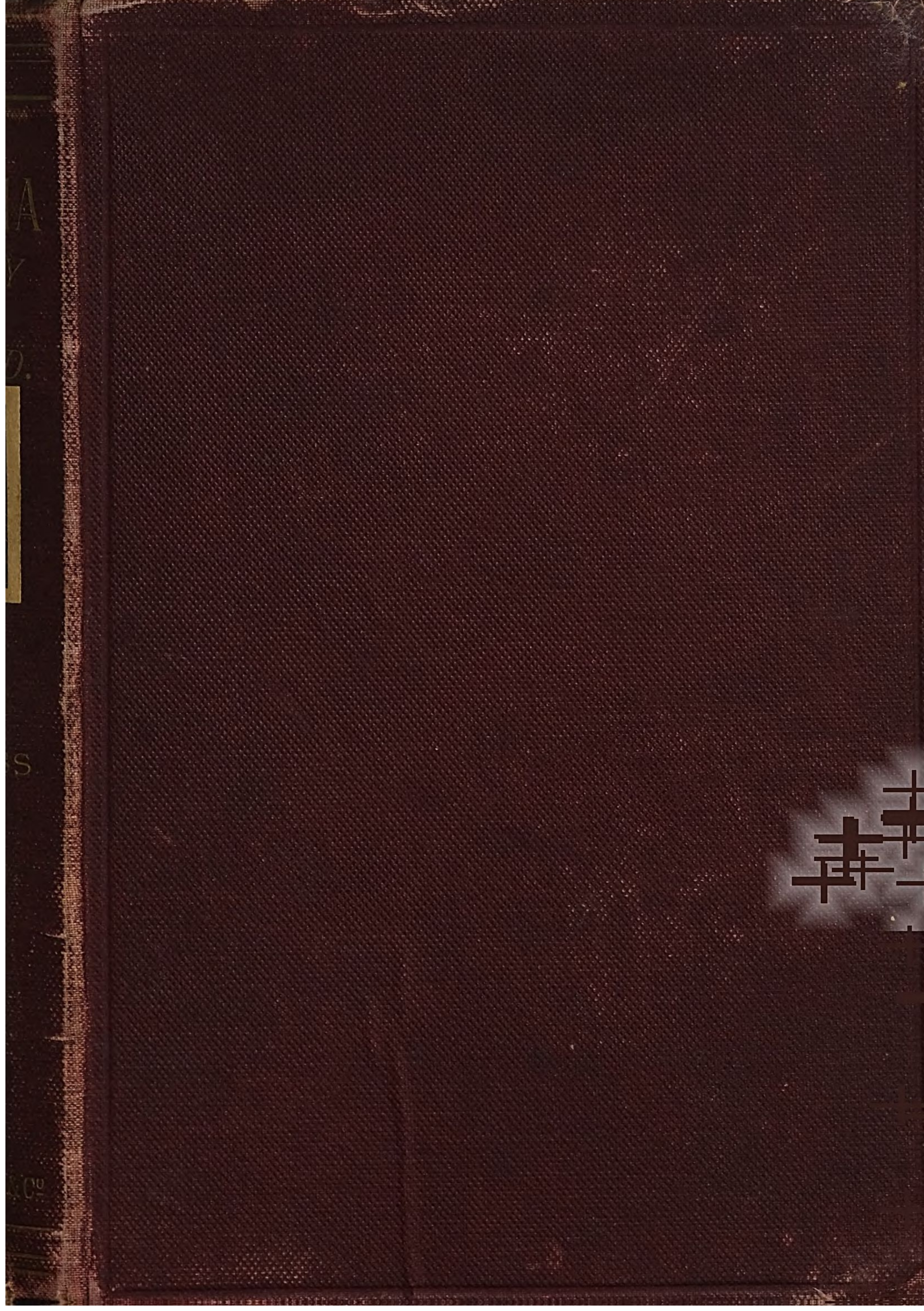






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GRANIA

By the same Author

HURRISH: a Study

IRELAND (Story of the Nations Series)

MAJOR LAWRENCE, F.L.S.

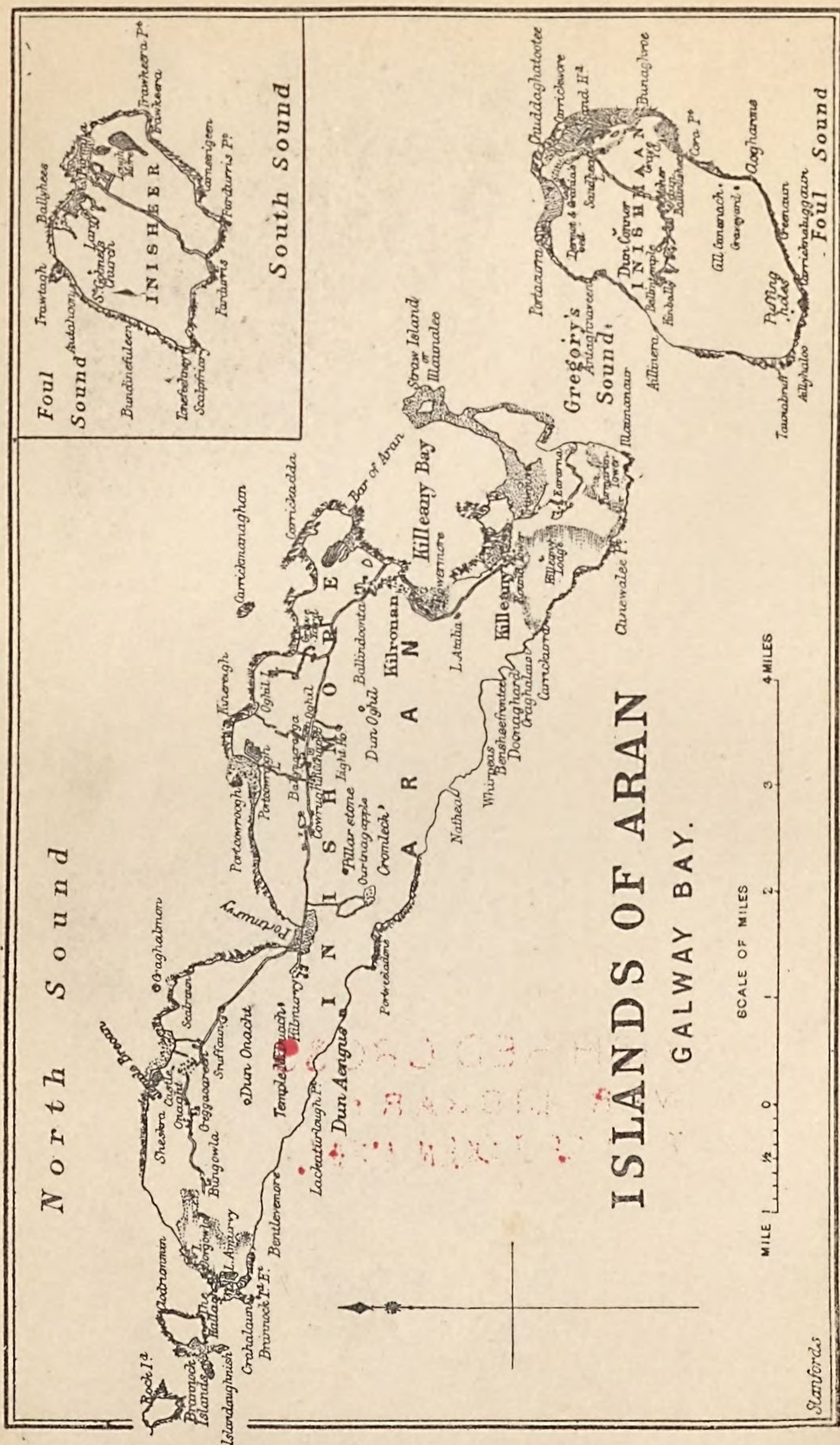
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G R A N I A or

THE STORY OF AN ISLAND

BY THE
HON. EMILY LAWLESS

AUTHOR OF 'HURRISH, A STUDY'
ETC.

A NEW EDITION

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

1894

950. 36866

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DEDICATION

To M. C.

THIS story was always intended to be dedicated to you. It could hardly, in fact, have been dedicated to anyone else, seeing that it was with you it was originally planned; you who helped out its meagre scraps of Gaelic; you with whom was first discussed the possibility of an Irish story without any Irish brogue in it—that brogue which is a tiresome necessity always, and might surely be dispensed with, as we both agreed, in a case where no single actor on the tiny stage is supposed to utter a word of English. For the rest, they are but melancholy places, these Aran Isles of ours, as you and I know well, and the following pages have caught their full share—something, perhaps, more than their full share—of that gloom. That this is an artistic fault no one can doubt, yet there are times—are there not?—when it does not seem so very easy to exaggerate the amount of gloom which life is any day and every day quite willing to bestow.

Several causes have delayed the little book's appearance until now, but here it is, ready at last, and dedicated still to you.

E. L.

LYONS, HAZLEHATCH:

January, 1892.

GRANIA



PART I

SEPTEMBER



CHAPTER I

A MILD September afternoon, thirty years ago, in the middle of Galway Bay.

Clouds over the whole expanse of sky, nowhere showing any immediate disposition to fall as rain, yet nowhere allowing the sky to appear decidedly, nowhere even becoming themselves decided, keeping everywhere a broad indefinable wash of greyness, a grey so dim, uniform, and all-pervasive, that it defied observation, floating and melting away into a dimly blotted horizon, an horizon which, whether at any given point to call sea or sky, land or water, it was all but impossible to decide.

Here and there in that wide cloud-covered sweep of sky a sort of break or window occurred, and through

this break or window long shafts of sunlight fell in a cold and chastened drizzle, now upon the bluish levels of crestless waves, now upon the bleak untrodden corner of some portion of the coast of Clare, tilted perpendicularly upwards; now perhaps again upon that low line of islands which breaks the outermost curve of the bay of Galway, and beyond which is nothing, nothing, that is to say, but the Atlantic, a region which, despite the ploughing of innumerable keels, is still given up by the dwellers of those islands to a mystic condition of things unknown to geographers, but too deeply rooted in their consciousness to yield to any mere reports from without.

One of these momentary shafts of light had just caught in its passage upon the sails of a fishing smack or hooker, Con O'Malley's hooker, from the middle isle of Aran. It was an old, battered, much-enduring sail of indeterminate hue, inclining to coffee colour, and patched towards the top with a large patch of a different shade and much newer material. The hooker itself was old, too, and patched, but still seaworthy, and, as the only hooker at that time belonging to the islands, a source, as all Inishmaan knew, of unspeakable pride and satisfaction to its owner.

At present its only occupants were Con himself and his little eleven-year-old daughter, Grania. There was, however, a smailer boat belonging to it a few yards away, which had been detached a short while before for the convenience of fishing. The occupants of this

smaller boat were two also, a lad of about fourteen, well grown, light haired, fairly well to do, despite the raggedness of his clothes, which in Ireland is no especial test of poverty. The other was a man of about twenty-eight or thirty, the raggedness of whose clothes was of the absolute rather than comparative order. The face, too, above the rags was rather wilder, more unsettled, more restless than even West Connaught recognises as customary or becoming. Nay, if you chose to consider it critically, you might have called it a dangerous face, not ugly, handsome rather, as far as the features went, and lit by a pair of eyes so dark as to be almost black, but with a restlessly moving lower jaw, a quantity of hair raked into a tangled mass over an excessively low brow, and the eyes themselves were sombre, furtive, menacing—the eyes of a wolf or other beast of prey—eyes which by moments seemed to flash upon you like something sinister seen suddenly at dead of night. Shan Daly, or Shan-à-vehonee—‘Shan the vagabond’—he was commonly called by his neighbours, and he certainly looked the character.

Even this man’s fashion of fishing had something in it of the same furtive and predatory character. Fishing, no doubt, is a predatory pursuit; still, if any predatory pursuit can be said to be legalised or sanctified, it surely is. Shan Daly’s manner of fishing, however, carried no biblical suggestions with it. Every time his line neared the surface with a fish attached, he clutched at it with a sudden clawing gesture, expressive of fierce,

hungry desire, his lips moving, his eyes glittering, his whole face working. Even when the fish had been cleared from the line and lay in a scaly heap at the bottom of the boat, his looks still followed them with the same peculiarly hungry expression. Watching him at such a moment you would hardly have been surprised had you seen him suddenly begin to devour them, then and there, scales and all, as an otter might have done.

For more than an hour the light western breeze which had carried the hooker so rapidly to Ballyvaughan that morning, with its load of kelp, had been gradually dying away, until now it was all but gone. Far and wide, too, not a sign of its revival appeared. Schools of gulls rose and dipped in circles here and there upon the surface of the water, their screams, now harsh and ear-piercing, now faint and rendered almost inaudible by distance. A few other fishing boats lay becalmed at widely separated points in the broad circumference, and, where the two lines of coast, converging rapidly towards one another, met at Galway, a big merchantman was seen slowly moving into harbour in the wake of a small tug, the trail of whose smoke lay behind it, a long coal-black thread upon the satiny surface.

Leaning against the taffrail of his vessel, Con O'Malley puffed lazily at his pipe, and watched the smoke disappearing in thin concentric circles, his brawny shoulders already bent, less from age than from an inveterate habit of slouching and leaning, showing

massively against that watery background. Opposite, at the further end of the boat, the little red-petticoated figure of his daughter sat perched upon the top of a heap of loose stones, which served for the moment as ballast. The day, as has been said, was calm, but the Atlantic is never an absolutely passive object. Every now and then a slow sleepy swell would come and lift the boat upon its shoulders, up one long green watery slope and down another, setting the heap of stones rolling and grinding one against the other. Whenever this happened the little figure upon the ballast would get temporarily dislodged from its perch, and sent rolling, now to one side, now to the other, according as the boat moved, or the loose freight shifted its position. The next moment, however, with a quick scrambling action, like that of some small marmoset or squirrel, it would have clambered up again to its former place; its feet would have wedged themselves securely into a new position against the stones, the small mouth opening to display a row of white teeth with a laugh of triumphant glee at its own achievement.

A wild little face, and a wild little figure! Bare-headed, with unkempt hair tossing in a brown mane over face and neck; a short red flannel petticoat barely reaching to the knees; another, a whitish one, tied by the strings cloak-fashion about the shoulders, and tumbling backwards with every movement. One thing would probably have struck a stranger as incongruous, and that was the small feet and legs were not, as might

have been expected, bare, but clad in comfortable thick knitted stockings, with shoes, or rather sandals, of the kind known as *pampooties*, made of cow's skin, the hair being left on, the upper portion sewn together, and tied with a wisp of wool in more or less classical fashion across the two small insteps.

Seen against that indeterminate welter of sea and sky, the little brown face with its rapidly moving glances, strongly marked brows, vividly tinted colouring, might have brought southern suggestions to your mind. Small Italian faces have something of that same outline, that flash, that vividness of colouring: gipsies too. Could the child by any chance, you might have asked yourself, be a gipsy? But no: a moment's reflection would have told you it was impossible, for there are no gipsies, never have been any, in Ireland.

Of course, the real explanation would soon have presented itself to your mind. It lay in that long-unrenewed, but still-to-be-distinguished streak of Spanish blood, which comes out, generation after generation, in so many a West Irish face, a legacy from the days when, to all intents and purposes, yonder little town was a beleaguered fortress, dependent for daily necessities upon its boats and the shifting caprice of the seas; the landways between it and the rest of the island being as impracticable for all ordinary purposes and ordinary travellers as any similar extent of mid-Africa to-day.

Hours pass unobserved in occupations which are

thoroughly congenial to our temperaments, and it would have been difficult to hit upon one more congenial to such a temperament as Con O'Malley's than that in which he was at that moment engaged. Had wind, sky, and other conditions continued unchanged, he would in all probability have maintained the same attitude, smoked his pipe with the same passive enjoyment, watched the horizon with the same vaguely scrutinising air, till darkness drove him home to supper and Inishmaan. An interruption, however, came, as interruptions are apt to come when they are least wanted. The fishing that afternoon had been unusually good, and for a long time past the two occupants of the smaller boat had been too busily occupied pulling in their lines to have time for anything else. It was plain, however, that strict harmony was not reigning there. Now and then a smothered ejaculation might have been heard from the elder of the two fishermen directed against some proceeding on the part of the younger one. Presently this would die away, and silence again set in, broken only by the movements of the fishers, the whisper of the water, the far-off cries of the gulls, and the dull sleepy croak with which the old hooker responded to the swell, which, lifting it upon its shoulders up one smooth grey incline, let it drop down again with a stealthy rocking motion the next moment upon the other.

Suddenly a loud burst of noise broke from the curragh. It was less like the anger of a human being than like the violent jabbering, the harsh, inarticulate cries of

some infuriated ape. Harsher and harsher, louder and louder still it grew, till the discord seemed to fill the whole hitherto peace-enveloped scene; the very gulls wheeling overhead sweeping away in wider circles as the clamour reached their ears.

Con O'Malley roused himself, lifted his gaze from the horizon, took the pipe out of his mouth, and, standing erect, flung an angry glance at the curragh, which was only separated from his own boat by some twenty or thirty yards of water.

Evidently a furious quarrel was raging there. The two fishermen, a minute ago, defined, as everything else, large or small, was defined against that grey, luminous background of water, were now tumbled together into an indistinguishable heap, rolling, kicking, struggling at the bottom of the boat. Now a foot or hand, now a head, rose above the confusion, as one or other of the combatants came uppermost; then the struggle grew hot and desperate, and the fragile craft rocked from side to side, but nothing was to be seen of either of them.

Suddenly Shan Daly's face appeared. It was convulsed with rage; fury and a sort of wild triumph shone in his black eyes; one skinny arm, from which the ragged sleeve had fallen back, rose, brown, naked, and sinewy, over the edge of the boat. He had pinned the boy, Murdough Blake, down with his left hand, and with the other was now feeling round, evidently for something to strike him with. Before he could do so, however, Con O'Malley interfered.

‘*Cred thurt, Shan Daly? Cred thurt?*’¹ he exclaimed in loud, peremptory tones.

There was an instant silence. Shan Daly drew back, showing a very ugly face—a face spotted green and yellow with passion, teeth gleaming whitely, rage and the desire of vengeance struggling in every line of it. He stared at his interlocutor wildly for a minute, as if hardly realising who he was or what he was being asked, his mouth moving as if he was about to speak, but not a word escaping from his lips. In the meantime, the boy had shaken himself free, had got upon his feet, and now proceeded to explain the cause of the quarrel. His face was red with the prolonged struggle, his clothes torn, there was a bad bleeding bruise upon the back of one of his hands, but though he breathed hard, and was evidently excited, it was with a volubility quite remarkable under the circumstances that he proceeded to explain the matter in hand. Shan Daly, he said, had quarrelled with him about the fish. The fish would roll together whenever the boat moved, so that the two heaps, his and Shan’s, got mixed. Could he, Murdough Blake, help their rolling? No: God knew that he could not help it. Yet Shan Daly had sworn to have his blood if he didn’t keep them apart. How was he to keep them apart? It was all the fault of the fish themselves! Yes, it was! So it was! He had done his best to keep them apart, but the fish were slimy and they ran together. Did he make them slimy?

¹ ‘What is the matter?’

No, he did not! It was God Himself who had made them slimy. But Shan Daly

How much longer he would have gone on it is difficult to say, but at this point his explanations were cut summarily short.

‘*Bedhe hushth, agus tharann sho,*’¹ Con O’Malley said curtly.

The smaller boat was then pushed up to the other and the boy obeyed. No sooner was he upon the deck of the larger vessel than Con O’Malley silently descended into the curragh. The two boats were again pushed a few yards apart, and Murdough Blake found himself left behind upon the hooker.

¹ ‘Hold your tongue and come here.’

CHAPTER II

HARDLY had the smaller boat pushed away from the larger one and regained its former place before the little girl upon the ballast scrambled hastily down from her perch, mounted the deck, and went up to the boy as he stood there astonished, furious, red to the roots of his hair with anger and indignant surprise.

She had been watching the struggle between him and Shan Daly with breathless interest. She hated Shan with all the hate of her fierce little heart. She loved Murdough. He was their nearest neighbour, her playfellow, her big brother—not that they were of any kin to one another—her hero, after a fashion. She adored him as a small schoolboy adores a bigger one, and like that small schoolboy, laid herself open to be daily and hourly snubbed by the object of her adoration.

‘Is it hurt you are, Murdough? Murdough dheelish, is it hurt you are? Speak Murdougheen, speak to me! Did the beast stick you? Speak, I say!’ she asked in quick, eager Irish, pouring out a profusion of those tender diminutives for which our duller English affords such a meagre and a poverty-stricken equivalent.

But the boy was too angry, too profoundly insulted by the whole foregoing scene, especially the end of it, to make any response. He pushed her from him instead with a quick, angry gesture, and continued to stare at the sea and the other boat with an air of immeasurable offence.

The little girl did not seem to mind. She kept pressing herself closely against him for a minute or two longer, with all the loving, not-to-be-repulsed pertinacity of an affectionate kitten. Then, finding that he took no notice of these attentions, she left him, and trotted back to her former perch, clambering over the big stones with an agility born of practice, and having dived into a recess hidden away between a couple of loose boards, presently found what she was in search of, and, scrambling back, came close up to him and thrust the object silently into his hands.

It was only a bit of bread, perfectly stale, dry bread, but then it was baker's bread, not griddle, and as such accounted a high delicacy upon Inishmaan, only to be procured when a boat went to the mainland, and even then only by the more wealthy of its citizens, such as Con O'Malley, who had a fancy for such exotic dainties, and found an eternal diet of potatoes and oatmeal porridge, even if varied by a bit of cabbage and stringy bacon upon Sundays and saints' days, apt at times to pall.

It seemed as if even this treasured offering would not at first propitiate the angry boy. He even went so

far as to make a gesture with his hand as if upon the point of flinging it away from him into the sea. Some internal monitor probably made him refrain from this last act of desperation, for it was getting late, and a long time since he had eaten anything. He stood still, however, a picture of sullen irresolution: his good-looking, blunt featured, thoroughly Irish face lowering, his under-lip thrust forward, his hands, one of them with the piece of bread in it, hanging by his side. A sharper voice than Grania's came, however, to arouse him.

‘*Monnum oan d’youl! Monnum oan d’youl!*’¹ Con O’Malley shouted angrily from the curragh. ‘Go to her helm this minute, ma bouchaleen, or it will be the worse for you! Is it on to the Inishscattery rocks you’d have us be driving?’

Murdough Blake started; then, with another angry pout, crossed the deck of the hooker, and went to take up his place beside the helm, upon the same spot on which Con O’Malley himself had stood a few minutes before. The big boat was almost immovable; still, the Atlantic is never exactly a toy to play with, and it was necessary for some hand to be upon the helm in case of a sudden capricious change of wind, or unlooked-for squall arising. Little Grania did not go back to her former place upon the ballast, but, trotting after him, scrambled nimbly on to the narrow, almost knife-like edge of the hooker, twisting her small pampootie-clad

¹ ‘My soul from the devil.’

feet round a rope, so as to get a better purchase and be able to balance herself.

The afternoon was closing in quickly now. Clouds had gathered thickly to northward. The naked stone-strewn country between Spiddal and Cashla, the wild, almost unvisited, wholly roadless region beyond Great-man's Bay, were all lost to sight in dull, purplish-brown shadows. Around the boat the water, however, was still grey and luminous, and the sky above it clear, but the distance was filled with racing, hurrying streaks of darker water; while from time to time sudden flurries of wind broke up the hitherto perfect reflections.

Usually, when these two companions were alone together, an incessant chattering went on, or, to be accurate, an incessant monologue; for Murdough Blake already possessed one of the more distinctive gifts of his countrymen, and his tongue had a power of building up castles in the air—castles in which he himself, of course, was chief actor, owner, lord, general person of importance—castles which would sometimes mount up, tier above tier, higher and higher, tottering dizzily before the dazzled eyes of his small companion, till even her admiration, her capacity for belief, failed to follow them longer.

Neither of them knew a single word of English, for the schoolmaster had not in those days even casually visited Inishmaan, which is still, at the moment I write, the most retrograde spot, probably, within the four seas. The loss was none to them, however, for they

were unaware of it. No one about them spoke English, and had they spoken it, nay, used it habitually, it would have been less an aid probably than a hindrance to these architectural glories. To-day, however, Murdough was in no mood to exhibit any of his usual rhetorical feats. He was thoroughly out of temper. His vanity had been badly mauled, not so much by Shan Daly's attack upon him—for, like everyone in and around Inishmaan, he despised Shan Daly—as by the fashion in which Con O'Malley had cut short his own explanations. This had touched it to the quick: and Murdough Blake's vanity was already a serious possession, not one to be wounded with impunity. Con being out of reach, and too high in any case for reprisals, he paid back his wrongs, as most of us do, in snubs upon the person nearest at hand. The *tête-à-tête*, therefore, was a silent one. From time to time the hooker would give a friendly, encouraging croak, as if to suggest a topic, sloping now a little to the right, now to the left, as the soft air began to be invaded by fresher currents coming in from the Atlantic—wild nurse, mother, and grandmother of storms, calm enough just then, but with the potentiality of, Heaven only knows how many, unborn tempests for ever and for ever brooding within her restless old breast.

Occasionally Murdoch would take a bite out of the slice of white bread, but carelessly, and with a nonchalant air, as much as to say that he would just as soon have been doing anything else. Whenever he

did this, little Grania would watch him from the ledge upon which she had perched herself, her big dark eyes glistening with satisfaction as the mouthful disappeared down his throat. Now and then too she would turn for a moment towards the curragh, and as she did so and as her eye caught sight of Shan Daly's slouching figure a gleam of intense rage would sweep across the little brown face, the soft upper lip wrinkling and curling expressively as one may see a small dog's lips curl when it longs to bite. Ill would it have fared with Shan-à-veehonee or Shan-à-gaddy ('Shan the thief')—which was another of his local names—had her power to punish him been equal to her wish to do so. Her hates and her loves ranged at present over a ridiculously narrow compass, but they were not at all ridiculous in their intensity. It was a small vessel, but there was an astonishing amount of latent heat, of latent possibilities, alike for good and ill, in it.

CHAPTER III

ON board the curragh, meanwhile, the silence had been equally unbroken.

Con O'Malley did not care about this commonplace hand-line fishing. He always took a prominent part in the herring fishery, which is the chief fishing event of the year in Galway Bay and is carried on on board of the hookers, upon the decks of which a small windlass is generally rigged up by the fishermen, so that the net may be more easily hauled on board, when the fish, being cleared from it, tumble down in a great, scaly, convulsive heap upon the deck. The herring fishery was over, however, for this year; there were no mackerel in the bay at present; and this stupid hand-line fishing hardly, in his opinion, brought in enough to make it worth while to interest himself in it. He was vexed, too, at having had to leave his comfortable perch and open-eyed afternoon snooze in order to separate these two fighting idiots. Though he was not in the least drunk, as you are, please, to understand, he had certainly taken two or three glasses of undesirably

raw whisky in pretty quick succession before leaving Ballyvaughan, and this, added to the sleepiness engendered by a whole day in the open air, naturally disposed him to the passive, rather than more active, forms of occupation.

He hardly made a pretence, therefore, of fishing; merely sat with a line in his hand, staring at the water with an air of almost preternatural sobriety. Shan Daly, on the contrary, for whom this fishing was the chief event of the day, and whose own share of the fish was his principal payment for such services as he was able to render, had resumed his previous attitude of watchful expectation, glancing up from time to time as he did so at his employer with a furtive, somewhat shame-faced expression; conscious that he was in disgrace, conscious, too, that he somehow or other deserved to be in disgrace, but with too limited a realisation of things in general, especially of the things we call right and wrong, to be able to define to himself very clearly in what his offence consisted. Beings of so eminently elementary an order as that presented by Shan Daly are apt to be more or less offenders against whatever society they chance to be thrown into; nay, are apt to belong in a greater or less degree to what we call the criminal classes; but their criminality is pretty much upon a par with the criminality of mad dogs or vicious horses. Punish them we must, no doubt, for our own sakes; restrain them still more obviously, if we can; but anything of a high tone of

moral and abstract condemnation is, I am apt to suppose, sheer waste of good material in their case. Like most of our poor, overburdened, and underprovided humanity, this luckless Shan was not, after all, entirely bad, or, to be accurate, his badness was not of an absolutely consistent and uniform character. He had a wretched, sickly, generally starved wife at home upon Inishmaan; a wretched, sickly, generally starved family, too, and some, at least, of these fish he was so anxious to obtain, and for the preservation of which he would hardly, in the mood, have stopped short at murder, were destined that night for their supper.

Not much time was given him on this occasion to follow his pursuit, for Con O'Malley was beginning to want to get back to Inishmaan, where he intended to put his small daughter, Grania, ashore, previous to sailing on himself to Aranmore, the largest of the three islands, in the harbour of which he kept his hooker, and where there was a certain already distinctly gleaming attraction in the form of the 'Cruskeen Beg' —largest, best kept, most luxurious of the public-houses upon the three islands, and the chief scene of such not, after all, very wild or seductive conviviality as was attainable upon them.

Signalling, therefore, to Murdough Blake to pull the two vessels closer together, he presently mounted the hooker, followed by the reluctant Shan, the curragh was let drop back into its former place, and they were soon

scudding westward over the bay, all the four sails—mainsail, foresail, jib, and a small triangular one above the mainsail—being expanded to their utmost to catch the still light and capriciously shifting afternoon breeze.

CHAPTER IV

TIRED of trying to conciliate her not-to-be-conciliated companion, little Grania by-and-by trotted over to her father and cuddled up to him, as he lounged, pipe in mouth, one hand upon a rope, his eye as usual upon the clouds. He was good-natured to her in his way, liked to have her with him on these occasions, would even now and then when they landed take her for a walk amongst his compeers, the other hooker-owners at Galway, Roundstone, or Ballyvaughan, though, at home upon Inishmaan he took no heed to her proceedings, leaving the whole charge, trouble, and care of her bringing up upon the hands of his elder daughter.

Leaning there, idly scanning the grey masses overhead, with floating, carroty beard, loose-lipped mouth, indeterminate other features, and eternal frieze coat dangling by a single button, this big, good-tempered-looking Con O'Malley of Inishmaan might have passed, in the eyes of an observer on the look-out for types, as the very picture and ideal of the typical Connaught peasant—if there are such things as typical peasants, or, indeed, any other varieties of human beings, a point that might

be debated. As a matter of fact, he was not in the least, however, what we mean when we talk of a typical man, for he had at least one strongly-marked trait which is even proverbially rare amongst men of his race and class—so rare, indeed, that it has been said to be undiscoverable amongst them. His first marriage—an event which took place thirty years back, while he was still barely twenty—had been of the usual *mariage de convenance* variety, settled between his own parents and the parent of his bride, with a careful, nay, punctilious, heed to the relative number of cows, turkeys, feather-beds, boneens, black pots and the like, producible upon either side, but as regards the probable liking or compatibility of the youthful couple absolutely no heed whatsoever. Con O'Malley and Honor O'Shea (as in western fashion she was called to the hour of her death) had, all the same, been a fairly affectionate couple, judged by the current standard, and she, at any rate, had never dreamt of anything being lacking in this respect. Sundry children had been born to them, of whom only one, a daughter, at the present time survived. Then, after some eighteen years of married life, Honor O'Shea had died, and Con O'Malley had mourned her with a commendable show of woe and, no doubt, a fair share of its inner reality also. He was by that time close upon forty, so that the fires of love, if they were ever going to be kindled, might have been fairly supposed to have shown some signs of their presence. Not at all. It was not until several years later that they suddenly sprang into

furious existence. An accident set them alight, as, but for such an accident, they would in all probability have slumbered on in his breast, unsuspected and unguessed at, even by himself, till the day of his death.

It was a girl from the 'Continent,' as the islanders call the mainland, who set the spark to that long-slumbering tinder—a girl from Maam in the Joyce country, high up in the mountains of Connemara—a Joyce herself by name, a tall, wild-eyed, magnificently handsome creature, with an unmistakable dash of Spanish blood in her veins. Con had seen her for the first time at old Malachy O'Flaherty's wake, a festivity at which—Malachy having been the last of the real, original O'Flaherties of Aranmore—nearly every man in the three islands had mustered, as well as a considerable sprinkling of more or less remotely connected Joyces and O'Flaherties from the opposite coast. Whole barrels of whisky had been broached, and the drinking, dancing, and doings generally had been quite in accordance with the best of the old traditions.

Amongst the women gathered together on this celebrated occasion, Delia Joyce, of Maam in Connemara, had borne away the palm, as a Queen's yacht might have borne it away amongst an assembly of hookers and canal barges. Not a young man present on the spot—little as most of them were apt to be troubled with such perturbations—but felt a dim, unexplained trouble awake in his breast as the young woman from Maam swept past him, or danced with measured, stately steps down

the centre of the stone floor; her red petticoat slightly kilted above her ankles, her head thrown back, her great, dark, slumberous eyes sweeping round the room, as she looked demurely from one strange face to another. Upon Con O'Malley—not amongst the category of young men—the effect was the most marked, most instantaneous, most overwhelming of all! Delia Joyce, as everyone in the room discovered in ten minutes, had no fortune, and, therefore, obviously was no match. She was the orphan niece of a man who had seven living children of his own. She had not a cow, a gridiron, a penny-piece, an inch of land, not a possession of any sort in the world.

Regardless of this utterly damning fact, regardless of his own age, regardless of the outrage inflicted upon public opinion, regardless of everything and everybody, Con O'Malley fell hopelessly in love with her; clung to her skirts like a leech the whole evening; followed her the next day as she was about to step on board her curragh for the mainland; carried her, in short, bodily off her feet by the sheer vehemence of his love-making. He was still a good-looking man at the time; not bent or slouching, but well set up; a 'warm' man, 'well come' and 'well-to-do'; a man whose pleadings no woman—short, that is, of a bailiff's or a farmer's daughter—would disdain to listen to.

Delia Joyce coyly but gladly consented to respond to his ardour. It was a genuine love-match on both sides—that rarest of rare phenomena in peasant Ireland.

That it would, as a matter of course, and for that very reason, turn out disastrously was the opinion, loudly expressed, of every experienced matron, not in Inishmaan alone, but for forty miles around that melancholy island. A 'Black stranger,' a 'Foreigner,' a girl 'from the Continent,' not related to anyone or belonging to the place! worse than all, a girl without a penny-piece, without a stool or a feather-bed to add to the establishment! There was not a woman, young or old, living on the three islands but felt a sense of intense personal degradation whenever the miserable affair was so much as alluded to before her!

Marriages, however, are queer things, and the less we prophesy about them the less likely we are perhaps to prove conspicuously wrong. So it was in this case. A happier, more admittedly successful marriage there never was or could be, save, indeed, in one important and lamentable respect, and that was that it came to an end only too soon. About a year after the marriage little Grania was born, two years after it a boy; then, within a few days of one another, the mother and the baby both died. From that day Con O'Malley was a changed man. He displayed no overwhelming or picturesque grief. He left the weeping and howling at the funeral, as was proper, to the professional mourners hired upon that occasion. He did not wear crape on his hat—the last for the excellent reason that Denny O'Shaughnessy made none, and Denny O'Shaughnessy was much the most fashionable of the weavers upon

Inishmaan. He did not mope, he did not mourn, he did not do anything in particular. But from the day of his wife's death he went to the dogs, steadily and relentlessly—to the dogs, that is, so far as it is going to the dogs to take no further interest in anything, including your own concerns. He did not even do this in any very eminent or extravagant fashion: simply became on a par with the most shiftless and thriftless of his neighbours, instead of being rather noticeably a contrast to them in these respects. Bit by bit, too, the 'Cruskeen Beg,' which had hitherto regarded him as only a very distant and unsatisfactory acquaintance, began to know him better. He still managed to keep the hooker afloat, but what it and his farm brought him in nearly all found its way across the counter of it or some kindred shebeen, and how Honor O'Malley contrived to keep herself and the small Grania, not to speak of a tribe of pensioners and hangers-on, upon the margin left was a marvel to all who were acquainted with the family. Nine years this process had been going on, and it was going on still, and, as the nature of things is, more and more rapidly of late. Poor Con O'Malley! He was not in the least a bad man; nay, he was distinctly a good man: kindly, religious, faithful, affectionate, generous—a goodly list surely of the virtues? But he had set his foot upon a very bad road, one which, all over the world, but especially in Ireland, there is rarely, or never, any turning back upon.

CHAPTER V

THE hooker had by this time got into the North Sound, known to the islanders as Bealagh-a-Lurgan. Tradition talks here of a great freshwater lake called Lough Lurgan, which once covered the greater part of Galway Bay. This may be so or it may not, the word anyhow is one for the geologist. What is certain, and more important for the moment, is, that from this point we gain the best view that is to be had of the three Aran isles as a whole, their long-drawn, bluntly-peaked outlines filling the whole eye as one looks to westward.

Taken together in this fashion, the three isles, with the two sounds which divide them, and an outlying fringe of jagged, vicious-looking rocks and skerries, make up a total length of some fifteen miles, containing, roughly speaking, about eleven thousand acres. Acres! As one writes down the word, it seems to rise up, mock, gibe, laugh at, and confound one, from its wild inappropriateness, at least to all the ideas we commonly associate with it. For, be it known to you, oh prosperous reader—dweller, doubtless, in a sleek land, a land of earth and water, possibly even of trees—that

these islands, like their opposite neighbour, the Burren of Clare, are rock, not partially, but absolutely. Over the entire surface, save the sands upon the shore and the detritus that accumulates in the crannies, there is no earth whatsoever, save what has been artificially created, and even this is for the most part but a few inches deep. The consequence is, that a drouthy season is the worst of all seasons for the Aranite. Drench him with rain from early March to late November, he is satisfied, and asks no more. Give him what to most people would seem the most moderate possible allowance of sun and dry weather, and ruin begins to stare him in the face! The earth, so laboriously collected, begins to crack; his wells—there are practically no streams—run dry; his beasts perish before his eyes; his potatoes lie out bare and half baked upon the stones; his oats—these are not cut, but plucked bodily by hand out of the sands—wither to the ground; he has no stock, nothing to send to the mainland in return for those necessaries which he gets from there, nothing to pay his rent with; worse than all, he has actually to fetch the water he requires to drink in casks and barrels from the opposite shore!

A cheerful picture, you say! Difficult perhaps to realise, still more difficult, when realised, to contemplate placidly. Who so realising it can resist the wish to become, for a moment even, that dream of philanthropists—a benevolent despot, and swooping suddenly upon the islands, carry off their whole population—

priests, people, and all—and set them down in a new place, somewhere where Nature would make some little response, however slight, to so much toil, care, love, so fruitlessly and for so many centuries lavished upon her here?

‘But would they thank you?’ you, as an experienced philanthropist, perhaps, ask me. I reply that it is, to say the least, extremely doubtful. Certainly you might carefully sift the wide world, search it diligently with a candle from pole to pole, without hitting upon another equally undesirable, equally profitless place of residence. Climate, soil, aspect, everything is against it. Ingenuity might seek and seek vainly to find a quality for which it could be upheld. And yet, so strangely are we made, that a dozen years hence, if you examined one of the inhabitants of your ideal arcadia, you would probably find that all his, or her, dreams of the future, all his, or her, visions of the past, still clung, limpet-fashion, to these naked rocks, these melancholy dots of land set in the midst of an inhospitable sea, which Nature does not seem to have constructed with an eye to the convenience of so much as a goat!

The four occupants of our hooker naturally troubled their heads with no such problems. To them their islands—especially this one they were approaching, Inishmaan—were to all practical purposes the world. Even for Con O’Malley, whom business carried pretty often to the mainland, the latter was, save on the merest fringe, to all intents and purposes an unknown

country. The world, as it existed beyond that grey wash of sea, was a name to him, and nothing more. Ireland—sometimes regarded by superior persons as the very Ultima Thule of civilisation—hung before his eyes as a region of dangerous novelties, dazzling, almost wicked in its sophistication, and he had never set foot on a railroad in his life.

Inishmaan has no regular harbour, consequently it was necessary to get the curragh out again so as to set little Grania ashore. The child had been hoping the whole way back that Murdough Blake, too, would have come ashore with her, but he remained sitting, with the same expression of sulky dignity, upon the deck of the hooker, and it was the hated Shan Daly who rowed her to the land; which done, with a quick, furtive glance towards a particular spot a little to westward, he turned and rowed as quickly as he could back to the larger vessel again.

While the boat was still on its way, before it had actually touched shore, a woman who had been waiting for it on the edge might have been seen to move hastily along the rocks, so as to be ready to meet them upon their arrival. This woman wore the usual red Galway flannel petticoat, with a loose white or yellowish flannel jacket above, known as a 'baudeen,' and worn by both sexes on the islands, a handkerchief neatly crossed at her neck, with blue knitted stockings and pampooties upon her feet. At first sight it would have been difficult to guess her age. Her hair, better brushed

than usual, was of a deep, unglossy black, and her skin clear and unwrinkled; yet there was nothing about her which seemed to speak of youth. It was a plain face and a sickly one, with little or nothing of that play of expression which redeems many an otherwise homely Irish face, yet, if you had taken the trouble to examine it, you would have been struck, I think, with something peculiar about it, something that would have arrested your attention. Elements not often seen in combination seemed to find a meeting-place there. A look of peculiar contentedness, an indescribable placidity and repose, had stamped those homely features as with a benediction. The mild brown eyes, lifting themselves blinkingly to the sunlight, had something about them, chastened, reposeful, serene, an expression hardly seen beyond the shelter of the convent; yet, at the same time, there was something in the manner in which the woman ran down to the shore to meet the child, and, lifting her carefully over the edge of the boat, set her on her feet upon the rocks, a manner full of a sort of tender assiduity, a clinging, caressing, adoring tenderness, not often, hardly ever indeed, to be found apart from the pains and the joys of a mother.

This was Honor O'Malley, little Grania's half-sister, the only surviving daughter of Con O'Malley's first marriage. She had been little more than a half-grown girl when her mother died, but for several years had kept house for her father. Then had come the short-

lived episode of his second marriage and his wife's death, since which time Honor's one aim in life, her whole joy, her pride, her torment, her absorbing passion, had been her little sister.

The child had been an endless trouble to her. Honor herself was a saint—a tender, self-doubting, otherwise all-believing soul. The small sister was a born rebel. No priest lived on Inishmaan, or, indeed, lives there still, so that this visible sign of authority was wanting. Even had there been one, it is doubtful whether his mere presence would have had the desired effect, though Honor always devoutly believed that it would. The child had grown up as the young seamew grows. The air, the rocks, the restless, fretting sea; a few keen loves, a few still keener and more vehement hates: the immemorial criss-cross of wishes, hindrances, circumstances—these and such as these had made her education, so far as she had had any. As for poor Honor's part in it!—well, the child was really fond of her, really loved her, and that must suffice. There are mothers who have to put up with less.

Taking her by the hand the elder sister now attempted to lead her from the shore. It was a slow process! At every rock she came to little Grania stopped dead short, turning her head mutinously back to watch the hooker, as, with its brown patched sails set almost to the cracking point, it rounded the first green-speckled spit of land on its way to Aranmore. Whenever she did so, Honor waited patiently beside her until her curiosity

was satisfied and she was ready to proceed on her way. Then they went on again.

There were rocks enough to arrest even a more determined laggard. The first barnacle-coated set crossed, they got upon a paler-coloured set, out of reach of the tide, which were tumbled one against another like half-destroyed dolmens or menhirs. These stretched in all directions far as the eye could reach. The whole shore of this side of the island was one continuous litter of them. Three agents—the sea, the weathering of the air, the slow, filtering, sapping action of rain—had produced the oddest effect of sculpturing upon their surface. From end to end—back, sides, every atom of them—they were honeycombed with holes varying from those into which the two clenched fists might be thrust to those which would with difficulty have accommodated a single finger. These holes were of all depths too. Some of them mere dimples, some piercing down to the heart of the blocks, five, six, seven feet in depth, and as smooth as the torrent-worn troughs upon a glacier.

Ten minutes were spent in clearing this circumvallation; then the sisters got upon a waste of sand sprinkled with sickly bent, through which thin patches of white flowering campion asserted themselves. Here, invisible until you all but brushed against its walls, rose a small chapel, roofless, windowless, its door displaced, its gable ends awry—melancholy to look at, yet not without a certain air of invitation even in its desolation.

Sand had everywhere invaded it, half hiding the walls, completely covering the entrance, and forming a huge drift where once the altar had risen. Looking at it, fancy, even in calm weather, seemed involuntarily to conjure up the sweep of the frightened yellow atoms under the flail of the wind; the hurry-scurry of distracted particles; the tearing away of the frail covering of bent; the wild rush of the sand through the entrance; and, finally, its settling down to rest in this long-set-aside haven of the unprotected.

West of the chapel, and a little to the left of the ruined entrance, stood a cross, though one which a casual glance would hardly have recognised as such, for there were no cross arms—apparently never had been any—and the figure upon the upright post was so worn by weather, so utterly extinguished, rubbed, and lichen-crusted by the centuries, as hardly to have a trace of humanity left. Honor never passed the place without stopping to say a prayer here. For her it had a special sanctity, this poor, shapeless, armless cross, though she would probably have been unable to explain why. Now, as usual, she stopped, almost mechanically, and, first crossing herself devoutly, bent her head down to kiss a small boss or ridge, which apparently once represented the feet, and then turned to make her sister do the same.

This time Grania would willingly have gone on, but Honor was less compliant than before, and she gently bent the child's reluctant head, coaxing her, till her lips

at last touched the right place. Grania did not exactly resist, but her eyes wandered away again in the direction of the hooker, now fast disappearing round the corner. Why had Murdough Blake gone to Aranmore, instead of coming back with her? she thought, with a sense of intense grievance. The disappointment rankled, and the salt, gritty touch and taste of the boss of limestone against her small red lips could not, and did not, alter the matter an atom, one way or other.

Leaving the chapel they next began to climb the slope, first crossing a sort of moraine of loose stones which lay at its foot. Like all the Aran isles, Inishmaan is divided into a succession of rocky steps or platforms, the lowest to eastward, the highest to westward, platforms which are in their turn divided and subdivided by innumerable joints and fissures. This, by the way, is a fact to be remembered, as, without it, you might easily wander for days and days over the islands without really getting to know or understand their topography.

A curious symmetry marked the first of these steps, that up which the sisters were then mounting: you would have been struck in a moment by its resemblance to the backbone of some forgotten monster, unknown to geologists. A python, say, or plesiosaurus of undetermined species, but wholly impressive vastness, stretching itself lazily across about a third of the island, till its last joint, sinking towards the sea, disappeared from

sight in the general mass of loose stones which lay at the bottom of the slope.

It was at the head of this monster that the O'Malleys' cabin stood, while at the other—the tail-end, so to speak—was hidden away that foul and decaying hovel in which the Shan Daly family squatted, lived, and starved. Though far above the level of the average stamp of Aran architecture, the O'Malleys' house itself would not, perhaps, have struck a stranger as luxurious. It was of the usual solid, square-shaped, two-roomed type, set at the mouth of a narrow gorge or gully, leading from the second to the third of those steps, steps whose presence, already insisted upon, must always be borne in mind, since they form the main point, the ground lines upon which the whole island is built.

A narrow entrance between two rocks, steep as the sides of a well, led to the door of the cabin, the result being that, whenever the wind was to the west or southwest—the two prevailing winds—anyone entering it was caught as by a pair of irresistible hands, twirled for a moment hither and thither, and then thrust violently forward. Impossible to enter quietly. You were shot towards the door, and, if it proved open, shot forward again, as if discharged from some invisible catapult. So well was the state of affairs understood that a sort of hedge or screen, made of heather, and known as a *corrag*, was kept between the door and fire, so that entering friends might be checked and hindered

from falling, as otherwise they assuredly would have fallen, prone upon the hearthstone. There were a good many other, and all more or less futile contrivances upon that little group of wind-worn, wind-tormented islands against their omnipotent master.

CHAPTER VI

BLOCKING the mouth of the already narrow gully stood a big boulder of pink granite, a 'Stranger' from the opposite coast of Galway. Leaning against this boulder as the sisters mounted the pathway, a group of five figures came into sight. Only one of these was full-grown, the rest were children—babies, rather—of various ages from five years old to a few weeks or less. Seen in the twilight made by the big rock you might have taken the whole group for some sort of earth or rock emanation, rather than for things of living flesh and blood, so grey were they, so wan, so much the same colour, so much apparently the same texture as what they leaned against.

Honor started forward at a run as soon as she caught sight of them, her pale face lit with a warm ray of kindness and hospitality.

'Auch, and is it there you are, Kitty Daly?' she exclaimed. 'But it is the bad place you have taken to sit in, so it is, and all your poor young children too! And it is you that look bad, too, this day, God love us! yes indeed, but bad! And is it long that you have been

sitting there? My God, I would have left the door open if I had thought you would come and I not in it! Yet it is not a cold day either, praise be to God!—no, it is a very fine, warm day. There has not been a finer day this season, if so be it will last till his reverence comes next week for the pathern. But what brings you up this afternoon at all, at all? It is too soon for you to be coming up the hill, and you so weak still—too soon altogether!’

While she was speaking the woman had got up, her whole little brood, save the baby which she held in her arms, rising with her as if by a single impulse. Seen in the strong light which fell upon their faces over the top of the gully they looked even more piteous, more wan and wobegone than when they were squatting in the comparative shadow at the base of the rock. She made no direct reply to Honor’s question, but looked up at her with a dumb, wistful appeal, and then down at the children, who in their turn looked up at what, no doubt, was in their eyes the embodiment of prosperity standing before them. There was no mistaking what that appeal meant. The answer was written upon every face in the whole group. Hunger was written there; worse—starvation; first, most clamorous of needs, not often, thank Heaven! seen so clearly, but when seen terrible—a vision from the deepest, most elemental depths, a cry to pity full of ancient primordial horrors; heartrending; appalling; impossible not to hasten to satisfy.

That this was the only possible answer to her question seemed to have immediately struck the kindly-natured Honor. For, without wasting further time, she ran to her own door, taking out a big key as she did so from her pocket. Another minute and she had rummaged out a half-eaten griddle-loaf, and was hacking big morsels off it with a blunt, well-nigh disabled dinner-knife.

Manners, however, had to be observed, let the need for haste be never so great, and no one was more observant of such delicacies than Honor O'Malley.

'Then, indeed, it is not very good bread to-day, so it is not,' she observed apologetically. 'It was last Tuesday week I would have wished to ask you to taste of it, Mrs. Daly. The barm did not rise rightly this time, whatever the reason was, still, after your walk you would, maybe, eat a bit of it, and I would be much obliged to you, and the young children, too. But it is some cow's milk that they must have. Run, Grania, run quick and fetch some out of the big methers, it is on the top shelf, out of the way of the cat. It is good cow's milk, Mrs. Daly, though it has been skimmed once; I skim it now in the morning, after Grania has had her breakfast. The child grows so fast it is the best milk she must have, but it is not at all bad milk, only skimmed once, or I would not offer it you, no, indeed, I would not, Mrs. Daly, ma'am.'

But the poor visitor was past responding to any such friendly efforts to shield her self-respect. She

tried to thank her entertainer, but the tears came too fast, and fairly choked her. One after another they gathered and ran down her thin white cheeks, fresh tears continually brimming her poor eyes, once a brilliant blue—not a common colour in the west of Ireland—and which still, though their brightness had waned, seemed all too blue and too brilliant for the poor faded face they shone out of.

‘Och, then! Och, then! Och, then!’ Honor O’Malley said in a gentle tone, at once soothing and remonstrating. ‘Och, then, Mrs. Daly, will you please give me the baby for a minute, ma’am? for it is not lucky, they say, to cry over such a young child. The *sidh*—God forgive me for naming such a wicked, heathen word!—the *sidh*, old people say, do be looking about, and if they see tears drop on a baby it is they will get it for themselves, so they will—God stand between us and all such work this night, amen! Well, Phelim sonny, and what ails you? Is it the milk that is sour? Then it is not very sour it can be, for it was only milked the morning before last. Grania, fetch some sugar and put it in the child’s milk. Bless me, Mrs. Daly, but he does grow, that child Phelim! only look at the legs of him!

The boy she was addressing was the eldest of the pitiful little group, a wistful-faced, shadowy creature of about five. His eyes were blue like his mother’s, though of a paler shade and more prominent. Big, startled eyes they were—the eyes of a child that sees phantoms in the night, that starts in its sleep and cries

out, it knows not why or about what. With those big eyes fixed full upon her face he was staring hard at Grania O'Malley, the pannikin of milk which had been put into his hands remaining untasted in the intensity of his contemplation.

‘Indeed and indeed it is too good you are to them, Honor O'Malley—too good entirely!’ poor Mrs. Daly managed to say, finding her voice at last, though still speaking through the sobs which choked her. ‘But it is yourself knows where to look for the blessing, so it is! And may God shield you and keep you in health and sickness, in joy and sorrow, in this world and in the world to come—yes, indeed, and beyond it too, if need be, amen! It is ashamed I am, sorry and ashamed, to be troubling you, and you not well yourself. But Shan, you see—it is very bad times Shan has had lately. There is no work at all to do, he says, not anywhere on Inishmaan, no, nor upon Aranmore even. There was some fish he was to bring in this afternoon, but he has not come back yet, and the evening it is late, and if he did catch the fish itself, it is not young children that can eat fish alone, so it is not. And me so weak still, it is but little I can do; for it is not, you know, till next Friday will be three weeks that——’

She stopped and looked bashfully down at the poor little bundle in her neighbour's arms. Though this was her fourth child, she had a feeling of delicacy about alluding to the fact of its birth which would have seemed not merely inconceivable, but monstrous to a

woman of another race and breeding. Honor, however, knew as much, or more, about the matter than she did herself. She had been with her at the time, although old Mrs. Flanagan, Phil Flanagan's mother, was the chief official in command on the occasion. It was Honor, however, who had baptised the baby—this poor little white-faced object then in her arms, whose birth and death had seemed likely to be contemporaneous. It was an office for which she was in great demand on Inishmaan, where, as explained, there was no priest, and where her peculiar piety made her seem to her neighbours specially fitted for such semi-sacerdotal duties. Of course such a baptism was only meant as a preliminary, to serve till the fuller rite could be bestowed; but, from the difficulties of transport, it often happened that weeks and months passed before any other could be given; nay, not unfrequently the poor little pilgrim had, before the end of that time, found its way to the last and safest haven for all such pilgrims, close to the old church of Cill-Cananach.

Looking down at the small waxen face upturned in her lap, Honor O'Malley felt that such a consummation was not in this case far off. She did not say to herself that it was so much the better, for that would have been a sin, but her thoughts certainly ran unconsciously in that direction as, having given it back to its mother, she bustled to and fro in the cabin, putting together all the available scraps of food she could find; which done, she tied them into a bundle and deposited the bundle

in the passive arms of little Phelim, who accepted it from her with the same dim, wondering stare of astonishment in his pale china-blue eyes—a stare with which every event, good or ill, seemed alike to be received by him. Five years' experience of a very troublesome world had evidently not yet accustomed him to any of its peculiar ways or vicissitudes.

CHAPTER VII

THE Daly brood departed with their booty, Honor next bustled about to get their own meal ready. Grania meanwhile had promptly dumped herself down upon her two small heels, and sat doing nothing, except staring sulkily at the fire. The child was thoroughly cross. She wanted her playfellow, and poor Honor by no means filled the blank. An old hen, sitting upon a clutch of eggs in a hole in the wall a little to the left of the fire, put its head out, and uttered a friendly interrogative cluck, by way of suggestion that it was there and would not object to a handful of oatmeal if it came in its way. Grania, however, took no notice, but sat, with her small brows drawn close together, staring at the ash-covered heap of turf, below which a dull red glow still smouldered.

Inside the cabin everything was warm, turf-scented, chocolate tinted. Walls, roof, hearth, furniture—what furniture there was—all was dim and worn, blackened with time, smoke, and much friction. Little light came in at the small, closely-puttied windows; much smoke down the wide, imperfectly-fashioned chimney. It

suited its inmates, however, and that, after all, is the main thing. To them, as to the old speckled hen, it was home—the one spot on earth that was theirs, which made the difference between warmth, self-respect, comfort, and a desolate, windy world without. Solid at least it was. There was no scamped work about it: no lath and plaster in the walls; no dust and rubble in the foundations. Had there been it would not have stood out against the first of the ten thousand storms that had beat against its solid little walls since the first day that they were planted in the mouth of that wicked, squally gully.

Supper over, Grania watched her opportunity. With a sudden slide, a run, a quick scramble, and a dart through the open door, she managed, while Honor was scouring out the black pot, to escape and run off at the top of her speed to a spot where she knew she would be safe, for some time at least, from pursuit.

This retreat of hers was a stone fort known as the *Mothar dun*, one of seven or eight so-called Cyclopean forts which stud the islands. This one, which was only a few hundred yards from their own door, was small, as Cyclopean forts go—not towering in air like a great natural cliff, as Dun Aengus does, nor yet covering the whole top of the island, like Dun Connor or Conchobhair, but forming a comparatively modest circle, set half-way up the slope—an absurd position, if you reflect on it from a military point of view, since it must have been dominated by any enemy who happened to stand

above it. Nobody on Inishmaan troubled themselves, however, about such matters, and little Grania O'Malley naturally least of all.

Clambering over the big blocks, excited with the sense of escape, and breathless from her run up the perpendicular, ladder-like face of the slope, she had just reached the innermost enclosure when, out of the darkest part of it, a figure bounced against her so roughly as to cause her to spring backwards, striking her foot, as she did so, against one of the sharp-pointed stones.

It was a big, red-headed lad of fourteen, or, perhaps, fifteen years old, extremely, almost painfully, ugly, possessing one of those faces which confront one now and then in the west of Ireland, and which seem to verge to a cruel degree upon the grotesque. So freckled was he that his face seemed all freckle; an utterly shapeless, and at the same time ridiculously inconspicuous nose; a shock head, tangled enough to suggest the historic 'glibbe' of his remote progenitors; with all that, a harmless, amiable, not even particularly stupid face, but so dull, and at the same time apprehensive looking, that its very amiability seemed to provoke and invite attack. Attack was certainly not spared on this occasion.

'Auch, and is it you, then, Teige O'Shaughnessy? And why must you be sticking there in the dark, knocking me down for nothing at all—yes, indeed, for nothing at all?' the child exclaimed as soon as she had recovered her breath. 'Augh, but it is yourself, Teige

O'Shaughnessy, that is the ugly awkward boy! the ugliest and awkwardest in all Inishmaan! My word, just wait till Murdough Blake comes back from the sea, till I tell him how you run out at me in the dark, and I doing nothing! It is Murdough Blake will give you the real good beating, so he will!—yes, indeed, the best good beating ever you got in your life, just to learn you manners! That he will, and more too, you ugly, clumsy *omadhaun!*'

She stopped, breathless, exhausted by her own volubility.

The boy so belaboured with words only stood still, his poor ugly face growing redder and uglier in his confusion.

'Arrah, is it hurt you are, Grania O'Malley?' he stammered sheepishly at last.

'And if it is hurt I am or not hurt, it is not to *you* I will be telling it, Teige O'Shaughnessy,' she replied haughtily. 'And I will be glad for you to go away, so I will, for I do not want to be looking at your ugly face, nor at your red hair, nor at any piece of you, so I do not!' And she flung herself face downwards upon the nearest stone.

Poor Teige found apparently no effective rejoinder to these observations, for, after staring stupidly at her for about a minute, he turned and proceeded obediently to depart, his heavy feet—heavy even in their soft cow's-skin pampooties—lumbering along over the rocks, the sound growing fainter and fainter as he disappeared down the stony hillside.

Little Grania waited where she was till he was out of sight, then she jumped up from the stone upon which she had thrown herself and clambered nimbly up, till she had reached her favourite perch on the top of the fort, where a small portion of the parapet still existed. Seating herself upon this she let her feet dangle out over the smooth flagged platform which stretched for some distance beyond.

She was still sobbing, from anger, however, rather than pain, her suffering being of the kind known in nursery parlance as a pain in the temper, the previous vexation about Murdough having been deepened and brought into fresh prominence by the recent encounter.

Teige O'Shaughnessy was an orphan, and lived with an uncle and aunt, an old brother and sister, who inhabited a cabin upon one of the outlying rocks, one which became an island at high tide and therefore was then unapproachable. The two were twins, and earned their bread, or rather the old man earned it for both of them, by weaving. Apparently it was a sorry trade, for the cabin in which they lived was so twisted, sea-battered, brine-encrusted, and generally miserable that, by comparison, most of the other houses upon the island might have been regarded by their owners as quite architectural and dignified domiciles. This, one would say, ought to have been a source of popularity, but, for several reasons, the O'Shaughnessys were rather pariahs upon Inishmaan. This was not on account of their poverty, which is never a really damning reproach in

Ireland, and probably, therefore, was due partly to the fact that, compared to most of its inhabitants, they were new-comers—at least, there were several very old people on Inishmaan who pretended to remember a time when there were no O'Shaughnessys there—partly to their extreme ill-favouredness, and, still more, to the fact that the two old people were deaf and dumb, and could therefore only communicate with their neighbours and the rest of the world by signs—a sufficient reason surely in a much less superstitious community than that of Inishmaan for regarding them as lying peculiarly under the disfavour of Heaven, and likely enough to bring that contagion or blight of disfavour upon other, and more fortunate, people if unduly encouraged and associated with.

Grania, a born aristocrat—all children are born aristocrats—shared this feeling in the strongest degree, and was well aware that Teige was in some way or other immensely inferior to herself, and therefore a person only to be tolerated when no more attractive company was to be had. She sat for some time longer with her feet dangling over the top of the fort, a quaint little red-petticoated figure, the solitary spot of colour in all that desolate greyness. Immediately beneath her the ridged platforms of rock showed their upturned edges, one below the other, fluted, worn, and grooved into every variety of furrow. Hardly a speck of green to be seen anywhere. Here and there an adventurous spray of honeysuckle or bryony, grown deep in the

hollows, showed perhaps a few inches of foliage above the wrinkled surface of the rocks, but that was all.

The winds were all hushed for that evening, but their power and prowess was written at large upon every worn crag, torn fissure, and twisted stump; upon the whole battered, wind-tormented scene. Inishmaan might from this point have suggested some weather-beaten old vessel, a raft or hulk given over to the mercy of winds and waves, keeping afloat still, but utterly scarred and defaced, a derelict, past all possibility of recovery.

After sitting for about a quarter of an hour upon the same spot, the child began to tire of her solitary perch. A new impulse seized her, and leaving the rath, she clambered down the wall, over the loose blocks scattered outside—remains of a still discernible *chevaux de frise*—ran across the level slabs of rock, till she reached the end of the one she was upon, when she dropped suddenly downhill, over, as it were, a single gigantic stair, thereby attaining the one below.

This brought her to a totally different aspect of the island, and, comparatively speaking, a cheerful and sheltered one. A narrow *coose*, or horseshoe-shaped bay, running some little way inshore, had created a sort of small sea-facing amphitheatre, backed by a semicircle of rocks, at the bottom and sides of which mountain ash, holly, and fuchsia—the latter still red with flower—grew and flourished, enclosing and sheltering a small, perfectly level green stage or platform.

At the end of this platform, which served it for a terrace, stood a house—not a cabin, and the only habitable abode on Inishmaan that could be called by any other name. It was said to have been built for a relation of the owner of the islands, who, fifty years before, had found here an asylum from his creditors. Whatever its history may have been, it formed undoubtedly an odd contrast to every other form of architecture to be found in the place. In shape it seemed to have been intended to imitate some small Greek or Roman temple, the front consisting of four cut granite pillars supporting a roof, and led up to by three wide, shallow steps, which steps were also of granite, the reddish feldspathic granite of West Galway. The back and sides of the building, however, were only of the ordinary blue limestone of the island, once plastered with stucco, and white, but long since blistered and broken away. Damp and decay had, in fact, got possession of the whole building. Not only had the stucco almost entirely fallen off, but even the scrolled iron banisters of a flight of steps which led from the end of the terrace to the sea were in many places worn to a mere thread by the constant friction of water and rust-producing action of the spray.

No one lived there now, though an old woman, the grandmother of Murdough Blake, was paid a trifle for looking after it, and was pretty generally to be found there in the daytime. With Grania it had always been a chief haunt and playground, partly because Murdough

Blake had a prescriptive right to go there to dig bait and loaf about generally, but also because there was a fascination for her in the tumbledown old house itself, so utterly unlike any other within the range of her experience.

As might have been expected, it was all shut up now ; so, having vainly tried each of the doors and windows, and rapped impatiently at two or three of them, she went down the steps and squatted disconsolately upon a bit of rock at the foot of them.

The air, mild as milk, had something about it that evening which seemed to touch the cheek like a caress. There had been no sunset worth speaking of, but the western sky and sea above and below the rim of the horizon were tinged with faint salmon, through which the grey broke, and into which it was gradually melting. To the north, behind the child's head, the great grey profile of Dun Conchobhair lifted its frowning mass, well defined against the sky—a dark, sinister fragment of a long-forgotten past, looking gloomily down upon the poor, squat, and weather-worn habitations of to-day.

The sea seemed to have grown curiously small. The 'Old Sea,' as the islanders call the Atlantic, was here hidden completely out of sight, and only the sound between the middle and smallest island, with a fragment of the bay beyond, was visible. To the left lay the remains of a small pier, where the owner of the villa had once moored his boats, now broken down and half

destroyed by storms. Seagulls floated hither and thither in the still water, tame as ducks upon a farmyard pool. Cormorants passed overhead with black, outstretched necks, and now and then the white-barred head of a diver rose for a moment, to disappear again into the depths of the water the next.

As it grew darker, the shapes of everything began to change, blend, and melt into one another. The crooked iron supports, bent and red with rust, took on new and more fantastic forms. They seemed now a company of spindle-legged imps, writhing, twisting, tugging to right and left, so as to escape from the weight of what they had undertaken to carry. Red flakes, fallen from them, lay in all directions upon the ground, mixed with fragments of black oarweed, like so many twists of old worn-out tobacco. Everything breathed a dull calm, a half-stupefied melancholy. The swell slid lazily up one side of the little pier, hiding its stones and rat-holes for a moment, then fell heavily back again down the other, with a movement that was almost suggestive of a shrug, a gesture of somewhat bored resignation.

For nearly an hour the child sat on and on, heedless of poor Honor's anxieties, dreaming dim, formless dreams, such as visit alike all young heads, whatever the measure of so-called education that may have fallen to the lot of their owners.

She thought over the incidents in the boat that afternoon, and clenched her two little rows of white teeth afresh at the recollection of Shan Daly's attack on Mur-

dough. Then she took to wondering where Murdough was, and whether he was on his way back, a vague dream of floating away somewhere or other in a boat, only he and she together, rising blissfully before her mind. A momentary qualm as to Honor came to cross these delights, quickly dispersed, however, by the reflection that Honor had her prayers and her cross, and that she really wanted nothing else, whereas she, Grania, wanted many things, while as for Murdough Blake, that hero's wants were simply insatiable—grew and multiplied, in fact, with such rapidity, that even his most faithful admirer could hardly keep pace with them.

By-and-by, as she sat there, the tide began to creep higher up, and nearer and nearer to her feet. There was a smell of salt and slimy things, which seemed to be mounting upon the rising water. A rat scuffled and squeaked not far off, and bats flew darkly to and fro overhead. Grania began to think of going home. She was not afraid of rats, bats, sea-water, or anything else. She was used to being alone at all hours, and as for the sea, it was almost her element. Still, as one had to go back and to bed some time or other, it seemed almost as well to go now.

On her way home she had to pass close to the half-peninsula, half-island upon which the O'Shaughnessys' cabin stood, barely visible at this distance under its load of black thatch, and looking rather like the last year's nest of some shore-infesting crow or chough.

The tide was still low enough to get to it, and the fancy took the child to go across and peep in at the window, which, like every other window upon Inishmaan, was sure to be unshuttered. Teige, no doubt, would be at home at this hour, and she would be able, perhaps, to give him a fright, in return for the fright he had given her an hour before.

The seaweeds were more than usually slimy upon the rocks covering the space which separated this small outlying fragment of Inishmaan from the rest of the island, and even in her pampooties little Grania found some difficulty in getting across, and stumbled more than once before she reached the rocks on the other side. No one came to the door, or seemed to hear her footsteps, and, as the door itself was shut, there was clearly nothing to be done but to go up to the cabin and apply her small nose to the one narrow, closely-puttied square of glass which in the daytime gave light to the dwelling.

Any illumination there was was now from within, not from without, for a bright turf-fire was blazing redly upon the hearth. At first sight the most prominent object visible was the loom, which practically filled up the whole interior of the cabin. Beyond it the child could presently distinguish two figures, a white figure and a red figure, both of them extraordinarily ugly—a frightful little old man, a hideous little old woman—both of them, too, though utterly, strangely silent, were nevertheless, as she saw to her dismay, gesticulating violently at one another. Now it was the old man who,

squatting down towards the ground, would spread out his arms widely, then springing suddenly erect wave them over his head, apparently imitating someone engaged in rowing, fishing, or what not, the whole performance being carried on with the most breathless vehemence and energy. Then the old woman would take her turn, and go through a somewhat similar evolution, expressive seemingly of weaving, spinning, walking, eating, or whatever she wanted to express, while, whichever was the principal performer, the other would respond with quick comprehensive jerks of the head, sudden enough and sharp enough apparently to crack the spinal column.

It was less like a pair of human beings communicating together than like a pair of extraordinary automata, some sort of ugly, complicated toy set into violent action by its proprietor and unable to leave off until its mechanism had run down. To the child, standing outside in the dark, the whole thing, lit as it was by the fitful illumination of the fire, and doubled by a sort of second performance on the part of a still more grotesque pair of shadows painted on the ceiling overhead, had something in it quite extraordinarily terrifying, quite indescribably mysterious and horrible. She knew, of course, perfectly well that it was only dumb Denny, and dumb Biddy O'Shaughnessy; that they always gesticulated like that to one another—not having any other way, poor souls, of communicating. She knew this perfectly well, but as she stood there, a little,

quailing, shaking figure, peering in through the unshuttered window, she became a prey to all the indescribable terrors, all the dumb, inexplicable, but at the same time agonising, horrors of childhood. She longed as she had never longed before in her life to get her head under some blanket, under somebody's skirt, anywhere, with anyone, no matter where, so only she had somewhere to hide, some hand to cling to. Her heart beat, her knees knocked together, her teeth chattered, and with that sudden sense of the necessity of finding some refuge stinging her through and through like a nettle, she turned and fled—as a scared rabbit flies—down the rocky way, across the slippery tide rocks, over the slimy, evil-smelling oarweeds, which seemed to be twining deliberately round her feet and trying to stop her, up hill and down hill, till she once more found herself inside their own cabin, and within the sheltering arms of the faithful Honor, who had been watching for her for an hour past from the threshold.

As for Con O'Malley, the hospitality of Kilronan proved, on this occasion as often before, too much for him, and he had to stay and sleep off the effects of it under the friendly, sheltering roof of the 'Cruskeen Beg.'

PART II

APRIL

CHAPTER I

SIX years have come and gone since that September evening, and our little twelve-year-old Grania has grown into a tall, broad-chested maiden, vigorous as a frond of bracken in that fostering Atlantic air, so cruel to weeklings, so friendly to those who are already by nature strong. Other changes have followed of a less benignant character. Con O'Malley is dead. Sundry causes, but chiefly, alas! whisky, have made an end of the stout master of the hooker, and in consequence that good ship has had to be sold, and Inishmaan has been left hookerless. Honor O'Malley, always delicate, had become a confirmed invalid, had not for many months left her own dusky corner of the cabin, nay, was only too likely before long to change it for a yet duskier abode. The Shan Dalys?—well, there is not much to say about the Shan Dalys. Shan himself had grown even a more confirmed vagrant than before. He lived

no one knew how, or where, for he was given to disappearing from Inishmaan for a week or more at a time, reappearing more ragged, if possible, than usual, with bloodshot eyes, tangled beard, and all the signs of having slept in holes or under the banks of ditches, a vagrant upon the face of the earth. The poor wife was, if anything, more of a moving skeleton than when we saw her last. Of the many children born to them, only two survived, Phelim and a little girl of five. Happy for the rest that fate had been pitiful, for in any less kindly country those left would literally have starved. Phelim was supported almost wholly by the O'Malley sisters, and not a day in the week passed without his coming, as a matter of course, to share their rations.

To turn to a more cheerful subject. Murdough Blake had grown up, as he had promised to do, into a tall, active, lissom young fellow. In his archaic clothes of yellowish flannel, spun, woven, bleached, made upon the island, in the cow's-skin pampooties which give every Aranite his peculiarly shuffling and at the same time swinging step, he ought to have rejoiced the inmost heart of a painter, had a painter ever thought of going to the Aran isles in search of subjects, a ridiculous supposition, for who would dream of doing so? He was anything but satisfied, however, with his own clothes, his own standing, his own prospects in life, or, for that matter, with anything else about him, excepting with young Murdough Blake himself, who was clearly

too exceptional a person to be wasted upon such a spot as Inishmaan.

A quarter of a century ago no golden political era for promising young Irishmen of his class had yet dawned, and, even if it had done so, the Aran isles are rather remote for recruits to be sought for there, especially recruits who are innocent of any tongue except their own fine, old, useless one. There was, consequently, nothing for Murdough to do except to follow in the old track, the same track that his father and grandfather had followed before him—namely, fish a little, farm a little, rear a little cattle for the mainland, marry and bring up a ‘long’ family like his neighbours, unless he was prepared to make a bold start for the land of promise on the other side of the Atlantic—a revolutionary measure for which, despite his many dissatisfactions, he lacked, probably, the necessary courage.

Whether he would have cared to do so or no, Grania certainly would not, and they were shortly to be married. To her Inishmaan was much more than home, much more than a place she lived in—it was practically the world, and she wished for no bigger, hardly for any more prosperous, one. It was not merely her own little holding and cabin, but every inch of it that was in this peculiar sense hers. It belonged to her as the rock on which it has been born belongs to the young seamew. She had grown to it, and it had grown to her. She was a part of it, and it was a part of her, and the bare idea

of leaving it—of leaving it, that is to say, permanently—would have filled her with nothing short of sheer consternation.

Perhaps to one whose lot happens to be cast upon an island—a mere brown dot set in an angry and turbulent ocean—the act of leaving it seems a far more startling piece of transplantation than any flitting can seem to one who merely shares a mainland dotted over with tens of thousands of homesteads more or less similar to one's own. To sail away, see it dimly receding behind you, becoming first a mere speck, then vanishing altogether, must be a very serious proceeding, one which, since it is not within our power to exchange habitations with a native, say, of Saturn or of Mars, it is not very easy to imagine exceeded in gravity.

If all humans are themselves islands, as the poet has suggested, then this tall, red-petticoated, fiercely-hand-some girl was decidedly a very isolated, and rather craggy and unapproachable, sort of island. In her neighbours' eyes she was a 'Foreigner,' just as her mother had been a foreigner before her, and there was much shaking of heads and lifting of hands amongst the matrons of Inishmaan whenever her name was mentioned. Even to her own sister who adored her, who had adored her from the cradle, she was a source of much disquietude, much sisterly anxiety, less as regards this life—which, from the good Honor's standpoint, was an affair of really no particular moment one way or other

—than as regards the future, the only future worthy in her eyes of the name.

Probably she was right enough. Such a frame as Grania's is a good, ready-made home for most of the simpler, more straightforward virtues. Honesty, strength, courage, love of the direct human kind, pity for the weak—especially the weak that belong to you, that are your own kith and kin, and dependent upon you—these were born in her, came to her direct from the hands of Nature. For other, the more recondite, saintlier virtues—faith, meekness, holiness, patience, and the rest—she certainly showed no affinity. They were not to be looked for—hardly by a conceivable process to be acquired or engrafted.

This, rather than her own broken health, her own fast approaching death, was the real sting and sorrow of Honor's life, the sorrow that, day after day, impaled her upon its thorns, and woke her up pitilessly a dozen times in the night to impale her afresh. Like some never-to-be-forgotten wound it would be upon her almost before she was well awake. Herself saved, and Grania, perhaps—not! It was a nightmare, a permanent terror, a horror of great darkness, worse a hundred times to her than if the anticipation had been reversed.

That in some mysterious way, she could not have explained how, her sister, rather than herself, might benefit by her own present sufferings, was the only counter-hope that ever for a moment buoyed her up. She had ventured, after long hesitation, to consult

Father Tom of Aranmore upon this subject the last time she had been able to go to confession, and if he had not encouraged, he had not absolutely discouraged, her from treasuring the notion. She did treasure it accordingly. Every new pang, every hour of interminable, long-drawn weakness being literally offered up upon a sort of invisible altar, with much trembling, much self-rebuke at the worthlessness of the offering, and yet with a deep-seated belief that it might somehow or other be accepted, little promising as, it must be owned, matters looked at present. Poor Honor! poor faithful, sisterly soul! We smile at you, perhaps, yet surely we envy you, too, and our envy cuts short and half shames us out of our smiles.

As for Murdough Blake, his views about Grania were of the simplest possible description. She was immensely strong, he knew, the strongest girl on Inishmaan, as well as the best off, and, for both reasons evidently, the most suitable one as a wife for himself. If she was 'Foreigner,' out of touch and tone with her neighbours, no such accusation could certainly be laid at his door. A more typical young man it would be difficult to find—typical enough to excuse some abuse of the term—typical in his aspirations, typical in his extravagances, typical, nay conventional, even in his wildest inconsequences, his most extravagant rhodomontades, paradoxical as that may seem to one unused to such flowers of speech. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Murdough Blakes had talked just as big, and done just

as little, strutted their hour in just the same fashion over the self-same rocks, and felt themselves equally exceptionally fine young fellows long before this one had come into existence. That Grania would be doing very well, really exceptionally well for herself in marrying him he honestly believed, though it would have been difficult to show any particular grounds for the conviction. In any case they would have been married before this, only that it happened there was no roof ready for them, Honor being too ill for another inmate to be brought into the O'Malleys' house, while, on the other hand, Grania would not leave her, even if she could have made up her mind to share the two-roomed cabin up at Alleenageeragh in which Murdough himself lived, in company with a widowed mother, a grown-up sister, a couple of younger brothers, sundry domestic animals, and a bedridden great-aunt.

As regards his marked desirability as a husband, she fortunately thoroughly agreed with him. To marry anyone but Murdough Blake would have seemed to her as impossible as to be herself anyone but Grania O'Malley. True, there had been troubles between them of late, some of them rather serious troubles, but no troubles, however serious, could touch that central point, the keystone and cardinal fact of her existence. For money, for instance, Murdough showed a perfectly perennial thirst—money, that is to say, earned by anyone in the world but himself. Another thirst, too, he already showed symptoms of possessing, more apt even

than this to deepen and increase as the years rolled on. These, and some other matters besides, were a source of no little trouble to Grania, all the more that she never spoke of them to Honor. She had one great panacea, however, for any and every trouble—a panacea which it were well that we all of us possessed. Oh, troubled fellow-mortals, self-tormented, nerve-ridden, live incessantly in the open air, live under the varied skies, heedless, if you can, of their vagaries, and, if you do, surely sooner or later you will reap your reward! Grania O'Malley had reaped hers, or rather it had come to her without any sowing or reaping, which is the best and most natural way. She had a special faculty, too, for such living—one which all cannot hope either to have or to acquire. She could dig, she could chop, she could carry, she could use her muscles in every sort of outdoor labour as a man uses his, and, moreover, could find a joy in it all. For words, unlike Murdough, she had no talent. Her thoughts, so far as she had any conscious thoughts, would not clothe themselves in them. They stood aside, dumb and helpless. Her senses, on the other hand, were exceptionally wide-awake, while for sheer muscular strength and endurance she had hardly her match amongst the young men of the three islands. This was a universally known fact, admitted by everyone, and a source of no small pride to herself, as well as of prospective satisfaction to Murdough. A wife that would work for you—not spasmodically, but from morning till night—a wife that would take all

trouble off your hands ; a wife that actually *liked* working !—could a brilliant young man with a marked talent for sociability desire anything better ?

Upon that particular morning, as upon nearly every other morning throughout the year, Grania had left the cabin early, after settling Honor in her usual corner for the day, and had taken down the cow to pasture it upon the bent-grass growing upon the sea-shore at the foot of the hill, not far from where the two sisters owned a small strip of potato-ground.

It was a bleak, unfriendly day, bitterly cold, with driving showers, though the month was already April. The sea, whenever she chanced to raise her head to look at it, was of a dull blackish purple, varied with vicious, windy-looking streaks of white along the edges of the rocks over which the rollers were sweeping heavily. ‘Moonyeen,’ the short-horned cow, was eagerly cropping the scanty grass, her head turned intelligently away from the blast. It was strictly forbidden, by the way, for anyone to pasture cattle on this bent-grass, and that for the excellent reason that a breach once made in it the wind got in, and the whole became once more a mere driving waste of sand. The agent for the property, however, lived away on Aranmore, at a safe distance across Gregory’s Sound, and everyone upon the middle island did, therefore, as they pleased in this respect, and Grania O’Malley did like the rest.

She had been digging hard in her potato-patch ever

since breakfast-time, and her drills were now nearly finished, and she herself felt comfortably tired, and satisfied. There is no room for ploughs upon Inishmaan, since no horse or even pony could turn upon the tiny spots of tillage so hardly captured from its stones. Donkeys and ponies are, indeed, kept by many of the islanders, but chiefly to carry the loads of kelp to and from the coast. Grania O'Malley had neither one nor the other, though many poorer neighbours possessed both. She was so strong that it would have seemed to her a sheer waste of good fodder, and she carried her own loads of kelp and seaweed persistently up and down the hill, till towards evening she would often find her eyes shutting of themselves from sheer fatigue, and she would fall asleep before the cabin-fire like a dog that has been all day hunting.

She was only waiting now to begin her midday meal of cold potatoes and griddle-bread for little Phelim Daly, who came with the regularity of a winter-fed robin to share them with her. She wondered that he had not yet appeared, and sat down upon a piece of rock to wait for him. Before she had been sitting there many minutes she saw the wild little figure coming towards her, across the slabs of rock. He was rather tall for his age, with the air of some sickly, ill-thriven plant that has run to waste, his pale blue, restless eyes looking up with the piteous expression of a forlorn, neglected animal for which no one cares, and which has almost ceased to care about

itself. He came and squatted down close to her side upon a smaller bit of rock which rose out of the sandy soil, his thin legs stretched out in front of him, his eyes looking piteously up at her out of his small white face.

‘Is it hungry you are, acushla?’ she asked, noticing his expression; then, without waiting for an answer, went and fetched a cake of griddle-bread tied up in a handkerchief which she had left at a little distance.

‘Phelim is hungry; yes, Grania O’Malley, Phelim is very, *very* hungry,’ the boy answered in a curiously forlorn, far-away voice, as if the subject had hardly any special reference to himself.

‘Here, then; God help the child! Here!’ and she thrust a large lump of griddle-bread into his limp, unchildish hands.

He began breaking off pieces from it and thrusting them into his mouth, but carelessly and as if mechanically, looking before him the while with the same vacant, far-away gaze.

‘Phelim’s leg’s hurt,’ he presently said dreamily. ‘The wind was bad to Phelim last night. Phelim was asleep and the wind came and said, “Get up, Phelim; get up, sonny.” So Phelim got up. It was dark—och, but it *was* dark; you couldn’t see anything only the darkness. Phelim wanted to crawl back to his bed again, but the wind kept calling and calling, “Come out, Phelim! Come out, Phelim!” so he went out. And when he got outside the clouds were all running races round and round the sky, and he set off running

after them, and he ran and he ran till he had run all round Inishmaan. And when he could run no further he fell down. But the wind wouldn't let him lie still, and kept saying, "Get up, sonny! Get up, Phelim!" Then when Phelim couldn't get up it went away, quite away. So Phelim lay still a while, and thought he was back in his bed. But by-and-by big crawling things, white things and red things and black, came crawling, crawling up, one after the other, out of the sea and over the rocks and over the sands and over Phelim, up his legs and along his back and into his neck. Then Phelim let a great screech, for the fright had hold of him. And he screeched and he screeched and he screeched and—and that's why Phelim's legs are so bad to-day,' and he began slowly rubbing them up and down with one skinny, claw-like hand.

Grania shivered and crossed herself. She knew it was all nonsense, that he had been only dreaming; still, everyone was aware that there often *were* wicked things about at night, and it made her uncomfortable to listen to him.

'Och, 'tis just the cold that ails you; nothing else, avic,' she said decisively. 'Here, wrap yourself up in this. God help the child! 'tis a mere bundle of bones he is,' she added to herself as she put the white flannel petticoat, which served her as a cloak, round the boy as he sat crouched in a bundle upon the bit of rock, the cold wind scourging his legs and blowing the sand into his weary-looking pale blue eyes.

She left him to go and fetch her spade, which was at the other end of the ridge. When she came back he had slipped behind the larger of the two pieces of rock, and, with her petticoat huddled about him like a shawl, was lying flat upon his stomach, engaged in picking out small morsels of white quartz which had got mixed with the other pebbles, and ranging them in a row, whispering something to each of them as he did so.

Grania stopped to look at him. 'What are you doing now, avic?' she asked curiously.

The boy turned at her voice, and looked up with the same vague, forlorn expression, not having evidently heard or understood. Then when she had repeated her question:

'It was the little stones,' he said dreamily.

'Well, and what about the little stones, child?'

''Twas something the little stones was telling Phelim. The wind is bad to the little stones. The stones cry, cry, cry. There is one little stone here that cries most of all; there is no other stone on Inishmaan that cries so loud.'

Grania stooped and looked at the pebbles as if to discover something more than common in them.

'Do all the things speak to you, Phelim?' she asked inquisitively.

'Then they do not; no, Grania O'Malley. Once Phelim heard nothing. The wind was gone; there was nothing—nothing at all, at all. All at once something said, "There is nothing now on Inishmaan but Phelim."

Then Phelim was more afraid of Phelim than of anything else, and he began to screech and screech. He screeched—och, but he screeched! Phelim *did* screech that night, Grania O'Malley!

'Arrah, 'tis worse you are getting every day, child, with your nonsense,' she said with a sort of rough motherliness. 'Here, come away with you; we'll go look for Murdough Blake on the rocks yonder: maybe he'll give you a fish to take to your mammy. Come!' She stuck her spade upright in the soil as she spoke and held out her hand.

Phelim got up and trotted obediently beside her down the slope. Having crossed the sandy tract, under the broken walls of the old church of Cill-Cananach, they got out upon the rocks beyond, half hidden now by the rising tide.

At the extreme end, where these rocks broke suddenly into deep water, a figure was standing fishing, a tall, broad-shouldered figure, looking even larger than it actually was, as everything did against that vacant background.

Grania hastened her steps. A curious look was beginning to dawn in her face: an habitual, or rather a recurrent, one, as anyone would have known who had been in the habit of watching her. It was a look of vague expectation, undefined but unmistakable; a look of suppressed excitement, which seemed to pervade her whole frame. What there was to expect, or what there was to be particularly excited about, she would have been

puzzled herself to explain. There the feeling was, however, and so far it had survived many disappointments.

Murdough Blake turned as they came up, vehement displeasure clouding his good-looking, blunt-featured face.

‘It is the devil’s own bad fishing it is to-d~~ay~~, so it is!’ he exclaimed, pointing to the rock beside him, upon which a few small pollack and bream were flapping feebly in their last agonies. ‘Two hours, my God! it is I am here—two hours and more! I ask you, Grania O’Malley, is that a proper lot of fish for two hours’ catching? And Teige O’Shaughnessy that caught seven-and-forty in less time yesterday—seven-and-forty, not one less, and he a *boccach*!’¹ Is it fair? My God! I ask you is it fair?’

Phelim had squatted down like a small seal upon a flat-topped bit of rock, evidently expecting to wait there for another hour at least. Murdough, however, was delighted at their coming. He had been only pining for an excuse to break off his occupation.

‘It is not *myself* will stop any longer for such fishing as that, so it is not!’ he exclaimed indignantly. ‘My faith and word no! Why would I stop? Is it to be looking at the sea? God knows I have seen enough of the sea! Enough and more than enough!’

Grania offering no objection to this very natural indignation, he rolled up his line, collected the fish, and they turned back together across the rocks.

¹ Cripple.

CHAPTER II

THEY were now upon the loneliest piece of the whole island. Far and near not a human creature or sign of humanity, save themselves, was to be seen. The few villages of Inishmaan were upon the other side, the few spots of verdure which might here and there have been discerned by long search were all but completely lost in the prevailing stoniness, and to eyes less accustomed than theirs nothing could have been more deplorable than the waste of desolation spread out here step above step, stony level above stony level, till it ended, appropriately enough, in the huge ruinous fort of Dun Connor, grey even amongst that greyness, grim even by comparison with what surrounded it, and upon which it looked austere down.

It was one of those days, too, when the islands, susceptible enough at times of beauty, stand out nakedly, almost revoltingly, ugly. The low sky; the slate-coloured waste of water; the black hanks of driftweed flung hither and thither upon the rocks; the rocks themselves, shapeless, colourless, half-dissolved by the rains that eternally beat on them; the white pools

staring upwards like so many dead eyes ; the melancholy, roofless church ; the great, grey fort overhead, sloughing away atom by atom like some decaying madre-pore ; the few pitiful attempts at cultivation—the whole thing, above, below, everywhere, seeming to press upon the senses with an impression of ugliness, an ugliness enough to sicken not the eyes or the heart alone, but the very stomach.

As Grania and Murdough pursued their way side by side over the rocks, little Phelim gradually lagged behind, and at last drifted away altogether, stopping dreamily first at one patch of sand, then at another, and becoming more and more merged in the general hue of the rocks, till he finally disappeared from sight in the direction of his mother's cabin.

The other two kept on upon the same level till they had got back to Grania's potato-patch. Here she picked up her spade, and at once resumed her work of clearing out stone-encumbered ridges, Murdough Blake perching himself meanwhile comfortably upon a boulder, where he sat swinging his pampootie-shod feet over the edge and complacently surveying her labours.

The girl drove her spade vehemently into the ground with a sort of fierce impatience, due partly to a sense of having wasted time, but more to a vague feeling of irritation and disappointment which, like the former feeling, had a fashion of recurring whenever these two had been some time together. The sods sprang from before her spade ; the light sandy soil flew wildly hither

and thither; some of the dust of it even reached Murdough as he lounged upon his boulder: but he only sat still and watched her complacently, utterly unaware that he had anything himself to say to this really unnecessary display of energy.

The theory that love would be less felt if it was less talked about certainly finds some justification in Ireland, and amongst such well-developed specimens of youthful manhood as Murdough Blake. It is seldom talked of there, and apparently in consequence seldom felt. Marriages being largely matters of barter, irregular connections all but unknown, it follows that the topic loses that predominance which it possesses in nearly every other community in the world. Politics, sport, religion, a dozen others push it from the field. Physiologically—you would have said to look at him—he was of the very material out of which an emotional animal is made, and yet—explain the matter how you like—he was not in the least an emotional animal, or rather his emotional activity was used up in quite other directions than the particular form called love-making. Of his conversational entertainment, for instance, to do him justice, he was rarely lacking.

‘Begorra, ’tis the wonderful girl you are for the work, Grania O’Malley!’ he observed, when the silence between them had lasted about three minutes. ‘Is it never tired you do be getting of it; never at all, summer or winter, say, Grania?’

She shook her head. ‘And what else would I be

doing upon Inishmaan if I did get tired of it itself, Murdough Blake?' she asked pertinently.

There being no very easy answer to this question, Murdough was silent again for another minute and a half.

'It is myself that gets tired of it then, so it is, he replied candidly. 'I would give a great deal if I had it, I would, Grania O'Malley, to be out of Inishmaan, so I would, God knows!' he continued, looking away towards the line of coast, low to the south, but rising towards the north in a succession of pallid peaks, peering one behind the other till they melted into the distance. 'It is a very poor place, Inishmaan, for a young man and a man of spirit to be living in, always, weekdays and Sundays, fine days, rain days, always the same. How is he to show what is in him, at all, at all, and he always in the same place? It is, yes, my faith and word, very hard on him. He might as well be one of these prickly things down there that do take a year to crawl from one stone to another, so he might, every bit as well, my faith and word!'

'You do go to Galway most weeks in Peter O'Donovan's turf-boat,' the girl rejoined, stooping to pick up a stone and tossing it impatiently away from the drill.

'And if I do, Grania O'Malley, what then? It is not a very great affair Peter O'Donovan's turf-boat. And it is not much time either—not more than three or four hours at the most—that I get in the town, for

there is the fastening of the boat to be done, and helping to get the turf on board, and many another thing too. And Peter O'Donovan he is a very hard man, so he is ; yes, indeed, God knows, *very*. And when I am in the town itself, and walking about in the streets of it, why, you see, Grania deelish, I've got so little of the English—— Bad luck to my father and to my mother too for not sending me to be learnt it when I was a bouchaleen ! A man feels a born gomoral, so he does, just a gomoral, no better—when he hasn't got the good English. And there are a great many of the quality too in the town of Galway, and it is not one word of the Irish that they will speak—no, nor understand it either—so they will not, Grania, not one word.'

'I've got no English either, and I don't want any of it,' she answered proudly ; 'I had sooner have only the Irish.'

'Arrah, Grania, but you are an ignorant colleen to go say such a thing ! 'Tis yourself that knows nothing about it, or you would not talk so. Language is grand, grand ! I wish that I knew all the languages that ever were upon this earth since the days of King Noah, who made the Flood. Yes, I do, and more, too, than ever there were on it ! Then I could talk to all the people, and hold up my head high with the best in the land. My word, yes, if I knew all the languages that ever were, I promise you I could speak fine—my word, yes !'

It was quite a new idea to Grania that there were

more languages in the world than English and Irish, and she meditated silently upon the information for several minutes.

‘There’s what Father Tom speaks in the chapel, when he comes over from Aranmore to say Mass,’ she observed reflectively. ‘“Ave Maria” and “Pater Noster.” Honor learned me that, and it is not the Irish, I know, and it would not be the English, I suppose, either?’

The remark was put in the form of an interrogation, but Murdough’s thoughts had travelled elsewhere.

‘Young Mr. Mullarky of Ballyhure was in Galway last day I was there, so he was. Och! but it is the quality that have the grand times, Grania O’Malley, and it is myself would have had the grand times too if I had been born one of them, that I would, the grandest times of them all. He was riding upon a big black horse, the blackest horse ever you saw in your life! Och! but the noise it made as it came down the street, scattering the people and clattering upon the stones. *Wurrah! wurrah!* but it did make the noise, I tell you, Grania, and the people all turning round to look at him, and he pretending not to see one of them. My God! but a horse is a wonderful beast! I would sooner have a horse of my own, of my very own, that I could ride all over the world upon the back of, than I would have a ship or anything! Yes, I would, my faith and word, yes.’

‘A ship would take you a deal further,’ Grania replied scornfully. ‘When my father had the hooker

he would put up the sails of her here in Inishmaan, and it would not be four hours—no, nor nearly four hours—before we would be sailing into the harbour at Ballyvaughan, and what horse in the world would do that for you?’

‘A horse wouldn’t take you over the sea, of course, but a horse could take you anywhere you wanted on the dry land, anywhere over the whole earth, just for the trouble of skelping it. Arrah my word! just think how you’d feel sitting on the back of it, and it galloping along the road, and everyone turning round to look at you. That’s how the quality feel, and that’s how I’d feel if I had been born one of them, as I might have been and as I ought to have been; for why not? Why should they have everything and we nothing? Is that fair? God who is up there in heaven, He knows right well that it is not fair, so it is not. There was a man last year at the Galway horse fair, and he had a little horse, a yellow-coloured one it was, Grania O’Malley, only the mane and tail of it were black, and I went up to him as bold as bold, and says I—“*Cay vadh é luach an coppul shin?*”¹ For I wanted to know the cost of it. “*Coog poonthe daig,*”² and that’s more than you’ve got about you this minute, I’m thinking, my poor gosthoon,” said he, with a laugh. Gorra, that’s true, thought I to myself, and I went away very troubled like, for my heart seemed tied with strings to that little yellow horse. And I watched it all day from

¹ What is the price of that horse?

² Fifteen pounds.

a distance, and everyone that went up to look at it; 'twas just like something of my own that I was afraid of having stolen, just the very same, and I could have leaped out and knocked them down, I was so mad to think that another would have it and I not. And about four o'clock in the afternoon there came a young fellow from Gort—a little dotteen he was, not up to my shoulder—and he too asked the price of it, only it was in the English he asked it, and the man told him seventeen pounds, for I understood that much. “Can it leap?” says the young fellow. “Is it leap?” says the other. “Yarra, it would leap the moon as ready as look at it, so it would, and higher too if you could find it anything to stand on!” says he, joking like. “Auch, don't be trying to put your comethers upon me,” says the young fellow who was wanting to buy it. “Do you think it was yesterday I was born?” says he.

‘Well, with that they went away to a place about a quarter of a mile from there, and I crept after them, hiding behind the walls, and every now and then I would peep over the top of a wall, and the heart inside me it would go hop, hopping, up and down, till I thought it would burst. And every time that little yellow horse lifted its legs or twitched its ear I'd leap as if I was doing it myself. And when the man that was selling it gave it now and then a skelp with a bit of a kippeen that he held in his hand I felt like murdering him—“How dare you be touching another gentleman's horse, you spalpeen?” I'd cry out only it

was in the inside of me, you understand, under my breath, I'd say it, for there were the two of them, and the one that was wanting to sell the horse was a big fellow, twice as big as myself and bigger, with a great brown beard on the chin of him. And ever since that day I've been thinking and thinking of all I'd do if I had a horse, a real live horse of my own. And at night I do be dreaming that I'm galloping down the hill over beyond Gort-na-Copple, and the four legs of the horse under me going so fast that you would hardly tell one of them from the other, and the children running out on to the road, and their mothers screeching and bawling to them at the tops of their voices to come out of that, or maybe the gentleman would kill them. Oh! but it is a grand beast, I tell you, Grania O'Malley, a horse is! There is no other beast in the whole world so grand as a horse—not one anywhere—no, not anywhere at all.'

Grania listened to all this in perfect silence. These aspirations of Murdough found her very much colder than his more juvenile ones used to find her. They did not stimulate her imagination, somehow now; on the contrary they merely made her feel vaguely uncomfortable and cross. All this talk about money and fine horses, and the quality, and what he would have done if he himself had been one of the quality was a mere fairy tale, and moreover a very tiresome fairy tale to her. There was nothing about it that she could attach any idea to; nothing which seemed to have any connec-

tion with themselves, or their own life present or future. She went on steadily cleaning out her drills, scraping the small stones in front of her and laying them in heaps at the side. Murdough meanwhile, having finished everything he had to say upon the subject of horsemanship, had travelled away to another topic, explaining, expounding, elaborating, pouring forth a flood of illustrations such as his native tongue is rich in. It was a torrent to which there was apparently no limit, and which, once started, could flow as readily and continue as long in one direction as in another.

Grania was hardly listening. She wanted—she hardly herself knew *what* she wanted—but certainly it was not words. Why would Murdough always go on talk, talk, talking? she thought irritably. She admired his interminable flow of words of course—she would not have been Irish had she not done so—at the same time she was conscious of a vague grudge against them. They seemed always to be coming between them. They were her rivals after a fashion, and she was not of a temper to put up patiently with rivals, even invisible ones.

‘Man above! but it is late ’tis getting!’ she suddenly exclaimed. ‘And I, that ought to have gone home before this!—yes indeed,’ she added, looking up at the sky, in which the light had shifted considerably towards the west since they had been there together. ‘Honor will wonder not to see me. It is half an hour ago I should have gone, so it is.’

‘Is it worse than common she is to-day?’ Murdough inquired carelessly, getting up from his rock and stretching himself with an air of unmeasurable fatigue.

‘It is not better any way,’ the girl answered curtly.

A great heap of seaweed which she had brought up from the shore was lying close under the low lacework wall of the little enclosure. Taking up her fork she stuck it into the whole mass, twisting it about so as to make it adhere; then with a sudden lift she raised the fork with all its dangling burden and laid it against her shoulder, and so burdened prepared to mount the hill.

Murdough watched her proceedings with an air of impartial approval. ‘*Monnum a Dhea!* but it is yourself that is the powerful strong girl, Grania O’Malley. There is not many of the boys, I tell you, on Inishmaan that is stronger than you—no, nor as strong either, so there is not,’ he observed appreciatively.

Grania smiled proudly. She knew that she was strong, and took an immense pride in her own strength; moreover, speeches like these were about the nearest approaches to compliments that Murdough ever paid her, and she treasured them accordingly.

They walked on together over the rocky platform till they had reached its edge, where a low cliff or single gigantic stair rose perpendicularly, leading to the one beyond. Here Murdough, who was a little in

front, clambered leisurely up, catching at the overhanging lip of the step with his hand, and pulling himself easily upwards with its aid till he stood upon the higher level. Then he waited for Grania.

With her dangling burden of seaweed depending from her shoulder it was not quite so easy for her to do the same. To have handed the whole thing, fork and all, to Murdough until she had in her turn climbed to where he stood would have been the simplest course, but then it was not a course that would have occurred to either of them. Murdough was supposed by Honor and the rest of the world to help Grania at her work, not having any work in particular of his own to do, but in reality their mutual share of that work was always exactly what it had been that afternoon. Habits grow as rapidly as ragweeds, especially where life is of the simplest, and where two people are practically agreed as to how that life is to be carried on; and that Murdough should trouble himself about anything that it was possible for her to do single-handed had long seemed to both of them a sheer absurdity. They might and did have differences about other matters, but so far they were absolutely at one.

Now, therefore, as usual, the rule held. Grania lowered the fork on her shoulder, so as to reduce its weight, bringing it down until its burden of seaweed covered her back and head. Then, exerting her muscles to the utmost, she scrambled up, half blinded by the sticky black stuff which dangled over her eyes,

helping herself as best she could with her left hand and wedging her knees into the small clefts as they rose one above the other, till at last, her face red and bathed in perspiration though the day was cold, she stood upon the ridge above.

This time Murdough did not compliment her in words upon her strength, but his glance seemed to say the same thing, and she was content.

From this point they had no more steps to climb, though they had to make a slight circuit to avoid a second and steeper one which lay just below the gully. Following the course of a small valley, grass-grown and boulder-dotted, they presently found themselves in the street, if street it could be called, of a tiny hamlet, consisting of some five or six stone cabins upon one side and three or four upon the other, minute cabins, built of materials so disproportionately big that two or three of the stone slabs sufficed for the length of a wall, which walls were grey as the still living rocks around them, and, like them, might have been seen on inspection to be covered with a close-fitting suit of lichens, sedums, and such small crops, with here and there something taller sprouting where a chink gave it foothold, or a piece of earth, fallen from the decaying thatch above, offered a temporary home.

This was Ballinlisheen, second or third largest of the towns of Inishmaan. A good many of its citizens—most of them apparently very old women—were sitting upon their heels at the doorsteps as the two

young people came up the track, Murdough sauntering leisurely along with his hands in his pockets, Grania with her black load of seaweed dangling halfway down her back. The latter did not stop to speak to anyone. She was in a hurry to get back to Honor, being conscious of having already delayed too long. Murdough, though a young man generally open to all social advances, was beginning to get hungry, so he, too, kept on steadily beside her, giving only an occasional nod or word of greeting as first one and then another head craned forward into the narrow space between the opposing doorways.

Conversation, which had lagged a little in Ballinlisheen before their coming, began to stir and grow brisk again after they had passed on and were moving along the top of the nearest ridge.

‘She is the big girl, Grania O’Malley! the powerful big girl, my conscience, yes,’ said old Stacia Casey, Mick Halliday’s wife, stretching out a neck long and scraggy as a turkey’s and looking after them with an air of contemplation.

‘Murdough Blake tops her by the head,’ replied her neighbour Deb Cassidy from the opposite side of the street, in a tone of contradiction.

‘He does not, then, nor by the half of it,’ retorted the other in the same spirit. ‘Is it marrying him she’ll be, I wonder?’ she added after a minute’s pause.

‘Is it eating her dinner she’ll be?’ exclaimed her friend with a laugh. ‘*Wurrah! wurrah!* but ’tis the

real born fool you must be, woman, to be asking such a question.'

'Ugh! ugh! but 'tis the real born fool *she* will be if she *does* marry him!' grunted an enormously big old woman, much older than any of the other speakers, Peggy Dowd by name, the professional story-teller, and at that time the oldest inhabitant of Inishmaan. She was supposed to live with a widowed daughter, herself a woman of nearly sixty, but was to be found anywhere else in preference, her great age and standing reputation making her everywhere acceptable, or at all events accepted.

'Murdough Blake, wisha!' she went on, emptying the small black pipe she was smoking with a sharp rap upon the stones. 'Trath, 'tis the poor lot those Blakes of Alleenageeragh are, and always have been, so they have! There was this one's grandfather—myself remembers him when he was no older than this one—no, nor so old by a year—a fine bouchaleen you'd say to look at him—broad and bulky, and a clean skin, and a toss to his head as if all the rest in the place were but dirt and he picking his steps about amongst them. Well, what was he? He was just nothing, that is what he was, and so I tell you, women, not worth a thraneen, no, nor the half of a thraneen. Ugh! ugh! ugh! don't talk to me of the Blakes of Alleenageeragh, for I tell you I know them—I know them, those Blakes of Alleenageeragh. St. Macdara! I *do* know them, and have reason to know them! There was another—

Malachy Blake his name was—a great man, full of goster and brag; you'd think it was the world he must have for himself, the whole world, no less, from Liscanor Head to Renvyle Point out yonder, and farther still. Well, I will tell you now about Malachy Blake. The heart of him was no better than the heart of a pullet—of a sick pullet, when the eyes of it begin to turn up, and it squeaks when you take it in your hand and turns over and dies on the floor. That was what Malachy Blake's heart was like—no better! I have heard him one day so you'd think the wind flying over the top of the island or the stars shining up in the sky would stoop down to listen to him, and the very next minute I have seen a little pinkeen of a man not up to his shoulder give him the go-by and abuse him before the girls, and he never showing no spirit nor a thing, no more than if he was dead. *Phoo! phoo! phoo!* I know them, those Blakes of Alleena-geeragh. There is a story that I could tell you about that same Malachy Blake would make the very eyes of you start out of your head, so it would. But there—'tis a poor case, God knows, to be telling stories to them that knows nothing; a poor case, a very poor case! A fine man he was anyway to look at, I'll say that for him, Malachy Blake, finer than this one, or six of him! and there was a many a girl in the place liked him well enough, though 'tis flat and low in his grave he is now, and has been these thirty years. *Phoo! phoo!* flat and low in his grave he is. Yes, indeed,

flat and low for all his boasting! But I shall be sorry for Grania O'Malley and for that good woman her sister if she marries young Murdough Blake, so I shall; very sorry! very sorry!

'It is not long Honor O'Malley will be in this world, marrying or no marrying,' said another old woman, many years younger than the last speaker, Molly Muldoon by name, a brisk, apple-faced little spinster of fifty-seven or thereabouts. 'It was only yesterday I was with her at their own house yonder, and it was the death-streak I saw plainly under her left eye, the death-streak that no one can live two months once it comes out on them. Oh, a good woman Honor O'Malley is, as you say, Mrs. Dowd, ma'am, none better in this world, nor beyond it either—a real saint, and a credit to Inishmaan and all belonging to her. It is myself has promised to be with her at the last, and at her laying out and at everything, so I have. "Keep Grania away," says she to me only yesterday. "'Tis broke the child's heart will be any way, and what good is it to be tearing the life out of her and I past knowing anything about it? Send for Murdough Blake," says she, "the minute the breath is out of my body, and bid him take her with my blessing and comfort her." Those were the very words she said. Oh, yes, a good woman, and a kind woman, and a tender woman is Honor O'Malley, a real saint. It is the loss she will be to Inishmaan, the great loss entirely.'

Mrs. Dowd grunted. She was not much of a devotee of saints, certainly not of contemporary ones.

‘And if it isn’t the real out-and-out right wake and funeral she gets it will be the shame of the place, no better,’ Molly Muldoon went on in a tone of enthusiasm. ‘Candles—the best wax ones—with tobacco and spirits for the men, and a plate of white salt to lay on her breast, and the priest, or maybe two priests, over from Aranmore. That is the least she should have, so it is, for none ever deserved it better than Honor O’Malley, so they did not.’

‘They’re rich, too, the O’Malleys,’ remarked Deb Cassidy from her side of the path—‘money laid by, and warm people always from first to last, no warmer anywhere. Oh, a real rich girl is Grania O’Malley—my God! yes, rich. There are not three girls on Inishmaan as rich as she is—no, not two, nor any other at all I am thinking.’

‘Trath, and it is none too rich she’ll find herself when she is married to Murdough Blake!’ old Peggy Dowd said bitterly. ‘’Tis down from the sky or up from the sea those Blakes of Alleenageeragh do expect the money to be coming to them. A gosthering, spending, *having* brood they are and always have been. Rich is it? Gorra! ’tis eight days in the week she’ll find herself working for all her money if she means to keep a roof over her head and Murdough Blake under it—yes, and going a shaughraun most like at the tail of it

all, so she will. Mark my words, women, so she will, so she will !'

No one ventured to contradict this prophecy, Peggy O'Dowd's age and reputation making the course perilous. There was a few minutes' silence, after which Molly Muldoon was the first to break up the conclave. She was the chief rearer of chickens on Inishmaan, and now got up briskly to see after the various broods to which every corner of her cabin was dedicated. One by one, most of the other women, too, got up and moved indoors on various domestic duties, till at last only old Peggy herself remained behind. She had no household duties to see to. She was a mere visitor, a sitter beside other people's hearths and a sharer of other people's victuals. She remained, therefore, squatting in the same place upon the doorstep, her big blue patched cloak hitched about her shoulders, her knees nearly on a level with her big projecting chin, her broad face, once immensely fat, now fallen into deep furrows and hollows, growing gradually impassive as the momentary excitement of recalling her old grudge against the Blakes faded away or got merged in other and probably equally long-remembered grudges. Sitting there, hunched in her big cloak, she might at a little distance have been taken for some sort of queer vegetable growth—a fungus, say, or toadstool, which had slowly drawn to itself all the qualities—by preference the less benignant ones—of the soil from which it had sprung. In places

like Inishmaan, where change has hardly any existence, the loves, hates, feuds, animosities of fifty or sixty years ago may often be found on examination to be just as green and just as unforgotten as those of yesterday.

CHAPTER III

GRANIA and Murdough had parted meanwhile upon the top of the ridge close to the old *Mothar dun*, he going west, she east. When she reached home she found the cabin-door still shut, a hen and clutch of chickens sitting upon the step waiting to be let in. It was evident that no one had been either in or out since she left it five or six hours before.

Inside the cabin was very dark, and Honor's thin white face showed ghost-like against this setting. She was half sitting, half lying, upon her bed, with her eyes closed, though she was not asleep, a board and a pillow covered with a bit of old striped cotton supporting her. Everything around had the peculiarly chocolate hue of peat. The cabin was clean—for an Irish cabin commendably clean—but the whole had the deeply-dyed, almost black, hue of a Rembrandt background. The face of the sick woman herself might have come from the canvas of quite a different master. Early Italian painters have all tried their hands at it. How well we know it!—that peculiar look, a look of toil-worn peace

—peace caught, as it were, out of the inmost heart of pain;—the hollow cheek, the deeply-marked eye-sockets, the eyes looking out as prisoners' eyes look from their dungeon bars;—we all recognise it when great art shows it to us, though rarely, if ever, otherwise. Upon a canvas Honor O'Malley's face might have been the face of a saint or a martyr. It *was* the face of a saint or a martyr, as saints and martyrs find their representation in these days of ours. Three long years the poor woman had lain there dying. Consumption had its hold upon her. It had been very slow and deliberate in its approaches—nay, in its earlier stage might have been arrested altogether had there been any means at hand of attempting anything of the sort, which, of course, there were not. Who can say what hours of pain had worn themselves out in that smoke-dyed corner? Who can say how many supplications had risen out of its recesses, how often the eternal complaint of the sea licking the base of the cliffs had seemed to Honor the voice of her own silent complaining, the unresting cry of the night wind her own dumb cries made audible? She had won peace now. She was dying comparatively quickly. Mercy was fast coming nearer and nearer, and would presently touch her with its wings.

Grania's step sounded on the rocks without, and she looked up suddenly, a smile of welcome waking in her hollow eyes.

'Is it yourself, it is, allanah?' she exclaimed joyfully as the younger sister came quickly in, pushed

upon the shoulders of the gust which always lurked in the throat of that gully.

‘’Tis myself, and ’tis wanting me you have been this while back, Honor, I know,’ the girl replied in quick tones of self-reproach.

‘Augh, no, child, ner a bit; ’twas only I—’ here her voice was stopped by an access of coughing, which shook her from head to foot and brought a momentary flush to her poor sunken cheeks.

Grania stood by penitently, helpless till the paroxysm was exhausted and the coughing had ceased.

‘’Twas the potatoes,’ she said apologetically when Honor again lay back, white and dry-lipped. ‘’Tis a bitter while they take this year, whatever the reason is; and then Phelim, the creature, came, and I got listening to him, and then Murdough Blake and—’

‘*Wurrah!* whist with the tongue of you, and don’t be telling me, child! Is it within the four walls of a house I would be keeping my bird all the long day?’ the sick woman said with tender impatience. ‘’Tis the uselessness of me, I was going to say, kills me. Never a pot cleaned nor a thing done since morning. But there! God knows, and He sent it; so ’tis all for the best, sure and certain.’

Grania without another word picked up the three-legged black pot, and ran to fill it at the well outside, setting it down on the fire when she returned, and beginning to mix in the oatmeal by handfuls for the stir-about which was to serve for their evening meal.

Honor lay watching her, her face still flushed from the last fit of coughing, the perspiration standing out in drops on her forehead and under her hollow eye-sockets, but a great look of content gradually spreading over her face as her eyes followed her sister's movements.

As long as it had been possible she had gone on working, long, indeed, after she ought to have ceased to do so. Her spinning-wheel still stood near her in a corner, though it was nearly a year since she had been able to touch it. Her knitting lay close at hand. That she still occasionally worked at, and even managed to mend her own clothes and Grania's, and to keep her own immediate surroundings sweet and clean.

Irish cabins are not precisely bowers of refinement, yet this corner, where Honor O'Malley's life had been for years ebbing slowly away, told a tale in its way of a purity which, if it did not amount to refinement, amounted to something better. Outside the wind howled, sweeping with a vicious whirl over the long naked ledges, loosening here and there a thin flake of stone, which spun round and round for a moment like a forest leaf, then fell with a light pattering noise upon the ridge below. Inside the sods crackled dully, as the fire blown by Grania ran along their ragged brown sides, or shot into a flame whenever a stray fibre helped it on.

Besides the two owners, and not counting an itinerant population of chickens varying in ages and degrees

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of audacity, the cabin boasted one other inmate. The dog tax being unknown, nearly every Irish cabin has its cur, and on the Aran isles the dogs are only less numerous than the babies. The O'Malleys, however, had no dog, and their house-friend (the *r* in the last word might appropriately have been omitted) was a small yellow, or, rather, orange-coloured, cat, noted as having the worst temper of any cat upon Inishmaan. Whether in consequence of this temper, or in spite of it, there was no cat who appeared to have also so constant a train of feline adorers. Remote as the O'Malleys' cabin stood, it was the recognised rendezvous of every appreciative Tom upon the island, so that at night it was sometimes even a little startling to open the door suddenly and catch the steady glitter of a row of watchful eyes, or to see three, four, or five retreating forms creeping feloniously away over the rocks.

'Tis the milk she does be tasting already, the little snaking beast,' Honor said, pointing to it, as it sat furtively licking its lips close to the hearth.

Grania struck the cat a light tap on the nose with the iron spoon she was stirring the pot with, an insult to which it responded with a vicious spitting mew, and a backward leap, which seemed to set all its orange-coloured coat on edge in a moment.

'Was it along by the sea-way you were to-day, allanah?' Honor pursued presently.

'I was, sister.'

'Did you pass by the old chapel?'

‘I did, Honor.’

‘Then you said, I’ll be bound, a prayer at the little old cross for me, as I bade you do?’

‘Well, then, Honor, I will not tell you a lie—no, I will not—but I never once thought of it,’ Grania replied penitently. ‘You see, Murdough Blake he was with me, and we got colloquing. But sure, sister asthor, don’t fret, and I’ll go to-morrow by the first streak of day and say as many as ever you tell me, so I will, Honor.’

Honor for answer sighed and lay back against the wooden settle as if some habitual source of trouble was weighing upon her mind.

‘Grania, it is a bad thing for you that there is no priest on Inishmaan, a very bad thing,’ she said, earnestly, an ever-present source of anxiety coming to the front, as it often did when she and Grania were alone. ‘How is a young girsha to learn true things if there is no one in it to teach her? When I lie at night in bed thinking, thinking, I think of you, Grania, and I pray to God and the Holy Mother, and to all the tender saints, that it may not be laid against you. Sure how can the child know, I say, and she never taught? The Holy Mother will know how ’twas, and may be when I get there, Grania, she’ll let me say the word, and show that it was no fault of yours, allanah, for how could you know and none here to teach you, only me that knows nothing and less than nothing myself?’

Grania’s fierce grey eyes filled for a moment. Then

with a sudden impulse she flung her head back, lifting the iron spoon she had just tapped the cat's nose with, and holding it defiantly in front of her.

‘Then I don’t want none of them to be learning me, only you, Honor—so, I do not,’ she said irritably. ‘I couldn’t bear to be driven or bid by any of them—so, I couldn’t!’

‘Is it a priest, Grania? My God! child, you don’t know what you’re saying! A priest! Why, everyone that ever was born into this world, man or woman, must obey a priest. You know that right well yourself, and what would be the end of them if they didn’t, so you do.’

‘I don’t care. I would not be bid, no, not by anyone,’ Grania answered defiantly. ‘And the priests arn’t all so good as you say, Honor, so they are not. I mind me there was a young girl over by Cashla way told me of the priest where she lived—Father Flood his name was—a terrible hard man he was, and carried a big stick, so he did, and beat the children frightful when they were bould—yes indeed. And one day she was going herself to the chapel and hurt her foot on the way, and couldn’t get in till Mass was half over. And Father Flood he saw her coming up, and he frowned at her from the altar to stop by the door, and not dare come nearer. So she waited, trembling all over, and wanting to tell him what happened. But presently he come down the chapel, and when he got close to her he caught her without a word by the side hair—just here,

Honor, she told me, above the ear—as he was passing by to the door, and pulled her by it right after him out of the chapel. And when they were outside he shook her up and down and backwards and forwards as hard as he could, yes, indeed, as hard as ever he could, she told me, and she crying all the time, and begging and praying of him to stop, and every time she tried to tell him what hindered her he just shook the harder, till it was time for him to be going in again, when he gave her a great push which laid her flat on the grass, and back with him himself into the chapel again. And she only ten years old and a widow's child !'

Honor sighed. 'Tis hard, God knows, 'tis hard,' she said. 'The world is a cruel place, especially for them that's weak in it. There is no end to the pain and the trouble of it, no end at all,' she said in a tone of discouragement. 'But, Grania dear, sure isn't it what we suffer that does us the good? "Pains make saints!" I heard a good woman I used to know, that's dead now, say that often. "Pains make saints," "Pains make saints,"' she repeated softly over and over to herself.

'Tisn't the hurting I'd care about,' Grania said scornfully. 'I've hurt myself often and never minded. 'Tis being bid by them that have no call or care to you. If one done to me what was done to that girl at Cashla I'd hit him back, so I would, let him be ten times a priest.'

Honor gave a sudden scream of dismay. 'Och then,

whist! and whist! and whist, child!' she cried, piteously. 'What are you saying at all, at all? Saints be above us, Grania, and keep you from being heard this day, I pray, amen! Sure a priest's not a man! You know that well enough. *Wurrah! wurrah!* that you would speak so! And I that learned her from the start! Holy Virgin, 'tis *my* fault, all *my* fault. The child's destroyed, and all through me! My God, my God, what will I do? Och, what will I do? Och, what will I do, at all, at all?'

Grania ran remorsefully and put her arms about her sister, whose thin form was shaken as if it would fall to pieces by the sudden violence of her trouble. Honor let herself be soothed back to quietness, but her face still worked painfully, and on her pale brow and moving lips it was easy to read that she was still inwardly offering up petitions calculated to appease the wrath thus rashly evoked.

Grania's penitence was real enough so far as Honor was concerned, but it did not alter her private opinion as regards the matter in dispute. 'I'd think him a man if he hit me, let him be what he would!' she repeated to herself as she ran into the next room to fetch the milk set out of reach of the cat since the morning's milking.

CHAPTER IV

THE stirabout ready, the two sisters ate their meal together. Honor's was that of a blackbird. In vain Grania coaxed her with the best-mixed corner of the pot; in vain added milk, breaking in little bits of carefully-treasured white bread, brought from the mainland. The sick woman pretended to eat, but in reality barely moistened her lips with the milk and touched a corner of the bread. When she could persuade her to take no more, Grania settled down to her own share, and with the aid of her yellow auxiliary speedily cleared the pot. With a man's power of work she had a man's healthy appetite, and could often have disposed of more food than fell to her share.

The meal over she got up, went to the door, and stood awhile looking down the gully towards the sea-shore. It was getting dusk, and the night was strangely cold. The wind sweeping in from the north-east felt rough and harsh. No screen or protection of any sort was to be found upon this side of the island. Worse still, fuel was scarce and dear. As a rule, the poor suffer less in Ireland from cold than from most of the other

ills of life. A smoke-saturated cabin is warm if it is nothing else. Turf, too, is generally abundant; often to be had for the trouble of fetching it home. In the Aran isles there are no bogs, consequently there is no turf, and the cost of carriage from the mainland has to be added, therefore, to its price. The traffic, too, being in a few hands, those few make their own profit out of it, and their neighbours are more or less at their mercy.

Upon Inishmaan, the most retrograde of the three islands, turf is scarcer and dearer than on either Aranmore or Inisheer. Sometimes the supply vanishes utterly in the winter, and until fresh turf can be fetched from the mainland the greatest suffering prevails; dried cowdung and every other substitute having to be resorted to to supply its place. Grania was always careful to lay in a good supply of turf in the autumn, and the sisters' rick was noted as the tallest and solidest on the island. This year, however, it had melted mysteriously away, much earlier than usual. They had burned a good deal, for the winter had been a severe one, and the sick woman suffered greatly from cold. Still Grania had suspicions that someone had been tampering with their rick, though, so far, she had said nothing about the matter to Honor, not wishing her to be troubled about it.

It was nearly time now to go down and see if the kelp fire was burning, and to set it in order for the night—the last task always in the day during the kelp-

burning season. Murdough Blake had promised to meet her there, and the consciousness of this made her feel dimly remorseful at the thought of again leaving Honor, although the kelp fire had to be seen to, and she had no intention of lingering a minute longer than she could help. With this idea in her mind she turned to look at her sister, a mere shadow now in her dusky corner, from which the hacking sound of a cough broke, with mournful iteration, upon the silence. A sudden feeling of pity, a sudden intense sense of contrast, swept over the girl's mind as she did so. She would have been incapable of putting the thought into words, but she felt it, nevertheless. Herself and Honor! What a difference! Yet why? Why should it be so? Honor so good, so patient, she herself so much the contrary! With that strong pictorial faculty which comes of an out-of-door life, she already saw herself racing down the hill towards the shore where the kelp fire was built; already *felt* the gritty texture of the rocks under her feet, the peculiarly springy sensation that the overhanging lip of one ledge always lent as you sprang from it to the next beyond; saw herself arriving in the narrow stony gorge where the kelp was burnt; saw the glow of its fire, a narrow trough of red ashes half covered and smothered with seaweed; saw Murdough Blake coming through the dusk to meet her. At this point a mixture of sensations, too complicated to be quite comfortable, came over her, and she left her momentary dreams for the reality, which at least was straightforward enough.

‘Is there e’er a thing I can do, sister, before I go?’ she asked.

‘Ne’er a thing at all, child. ’Tis asleep you’ll find me most like when you come back,’ Honor answered, cheerfully.

Grania left a cup with water in it within the sick woman’s reach, covered the fire with ashes, so that it might keep alight, laid her own cloak over Honor, and went out.

She was already late, and Murdough, she knew, had the strongest possible objections to being kept waiting; accordingly she hurried down the rocky incline at a pace that only one accustomed from babyhood to its intricacies could have ventured to go.

As she hurried along her own movements brought the blood tingling through her veins, and her spirits rose insensibly. She felt glad and light, she hardly herself knew why. Leaping from one rocky level to another, her feet beat out a ringing response to the clink of the grooved and chiselled rocks against which they struck. Once she stopped a moment to clutch at a tuft of wood-sorrel, springing out of a fissure, and crammed it all, trefoiled leaves and half-expanded pale grey flowers, into her mouth, enjoying the sweet sub-acid flavour as she crunched them up between her strong white teeth.

Better fed than most of her class, her own mistress, without grinding poverty, the mere joy of life, the sheer animal zest and intoxication of living was keener in her than it often is in those of her own rank and sex in

Ireland. Of this she was herself dimly aware. Did others find the same pleasure merely in breathing—merely in moving and working—as she did, she sometimes wondered. Even her love for Honor—the strongest feeling but one she possessed—the despair which now and then swept over her at the thought of losing her, could not check this. Nay, it is even possible that the enforced companionship for so many hours of the day and night of that pitiful sick-bed, the pain and weakness which she shared, so far as they could be shared, lent a sort of reactionary zest to the freedom of these wild rushes over the rocks and through the cold sea air. She did not guess it herself, but so no doubt it was.

The dusk lingers long in the far north-west, and upon the Aran islands longer apparently than elsewhere, owing to their shining environment of sea and still more to their treeless rain-washed surfaces, which reflect every atom of light as upon a mirror. It was getting really dark now, however, and the sea below her was all one dull purplish grey, barred at long intervals with moving patches of a yet deeper shadow. Splashes of white or pale yellowish lichens flung upon the dark rocks stood out here and there, looking startlingly light and distinct as she neared them. They might have been dim dancing figures, or strange grimacing faces grinning at her out of the obscurity. Over everything hung an intense sense of saltiness—in the air, upon the rocks, on the short grass which crisped under foot with the

salty particles as with a light hoar-frost. Fragments of dry crumpled-up seaweed, like black rags, lay about everywhere, showing that the kelp fires were not far off.

She hastened her steps. Was Murdough already there? she wondered. He was. As she came round the corner she saw him leaning against a big boulder, a 'Stranger' like the one that blocked the mouth of their own gully; ice-dropped granite blocks whose pale rounded forms stud by thousands the darker limestone of the islands.

'My faith and word, Grania O'Malley, but it is the late woman you are to-night!' he said, straightening himself from his lounging posture and speaking in a tone of offence.

'I know I am, Murdough agra!'

There was a tone of unusual submissiveness about the girl's voice as she advanced towards him through the dusk; a look almost of shyness in her eyes as she lifted them to his in the dimness.

'My faith and word but it is the long time, the *very* long time, I have been kept waiting. And it is the ugly lonely place for a man to be kept waiting in!' he continued in the same aggrieved tone. 'And it was not to please myself I came either. No, it was not, but just to help you with the kelp fire. And it is not one foot of me I would have come—no, nor the half of a foot—if I had thought you would have served me so.'

'Honor kept me. 'Tis sick she is this evening,

worse than common,' Grania answered simply. 'Was it wanting me very badly you were, Murdough agra?' she added, in the same tone as before.

'Yes, it was wanting you *very* badly I was, Grania O'Malley, for it was the *Fear Darrig* I could not help thinking of, and that it was just the place to see him, and it was that made me want you, for they say two people do never see him at the one time, and it is not I that want to see him now, nor at any time—not at all, so I do not!'

'My grandfather, he saw the *Fear Darrig* many's the time,' Murdough continued, presently, in a more amicable tone, 'he would, maybe, be setting his lines at night and it would look up at him sudden out of the water. Once, too, he told my grandmother he was up near the big Worm hole and it run at him on a sudden, and danced up and down before him, for all the world like a red Boffin pig gone mad. Round and round it ran as clear as need be in the moonlight, laughing and leaping and clapping its hands, and he praying for the bare life all the while, and shutting his eyes for fear of what he'd see, and not a single saint in the whole sky minding him, no more than if he'd been an old black Protestant bellringer!'

'You have never seen the *Fear Darrig*, have you, Murdough?' Grania asked with a slightly mocking accent, as she began to busy herself with collecting the dry seaweed and heaping it upon the smouldering fire.

'Well, then, I have not, Grania O'Malley, but a man

that is in Galway and lives near Spiddal—a tall big man he is, by the name of O’Rafferty—he told me that he had seen him not long since. He was going to a fair to sell some chickens that his wife had been rearing—fine young spring chickens they were—and he had them tied in an old basket and it on his back. And he had to go across a place where the sea runs bare, and the tide being out, there were big black rocks sticking up everywhere. It was a strange, lonesome place, he said, full of big hollows between the rocks, and he didn’t half like the look of it, for the day was very dark and he was afraid every minute the tide might be coming in on him, and the basket on his back kept slipping and slipping with every step he made, and not another creature near him, good or bad. “Arrah! what will I do now, at all, at all?” says he to himself, when, all of a sudden he heard a sort of croaking noise behind him, and he turned round, and there on the top of one of the rocks sat a little old man with a face as red as a ferret, and an old red hat on his head, and he croaking like a scald crow and squinting at him out of the two eyes.’

Murdough paused dramatically, but Grania merely went on stacking her seaweed, and he had to continue his narrative without any special encouragement.

‘Well, O’Rafferty, he just took one look he told me, no more, and with that he dropped the basket that was on his back, with the spring chickens in it and all, and he set to running, and he run and he run till he was over the place, and away with him across the fields beyond,

and never stopped till he had run the breath all out of his body, and himself right into the middle of the place where the fair was held! And it was the devil's own abuse he got from his wife, so it was, he said, when he got home that night, for letting her fine spring chickens be drowned on her, which she had been months upon months of rearing.'

'Then it is the cowardly man I think he was,' Grania said scornfully, lifting her head from her work for a moment. 'If it had been me, I would have looked twice, so I would, and not anyway have let the young chickens be lost and drowned in the sea.'

'Then I do not think he was the cowardly man at all,' Murdough replied warmly; 'and for chickens, what is the use of fine spring chickens or of money itself, or of a thing good or bad, if a man's life is all but the same as lost with him being terrified out of his senses with looking at what no man ought to be looking at? It is quite right, I think, Patrick O'Rafferty was, and it is what I would have done myself—yes indeed I would.'

Grania answered nothing, but her face did not relax from its indifferent, scornful expression, as with skilful hand she rapidly fed the kelp fire from the big black heap of seaweed hard by.

Murdough, however, was by this time in the full swing of narrative. All he cared for was an audience, whether sympathetic or unsympathetic mattered little.

'It is a very strange thing, so it is, a very strange thing, but it is not the worst things that give

a man often the worst frights, so it is not,' he said, in a tone of profound reflection. 'I have been out in the boats many and many a time when the sea would be getting up, and the other boys about me would be screaming and praying, and in the devil's own fright, fearing lest they'd be drowned. Well, now, I was not frightened then—no, not one little bit in the world, Grania O'Malley, no more than if I had been at home and in my bed! The very worst fright ever I got in my life—well, I cannot tell you what it was that frightened me so, no, I cannot! I was out by myself in Martin Kelly's curragh, fishing for the mackerel, and it was getting a bit dark, but the sea was not wild, not to say wild at all; there was no reason to be frightened, no reason in life, when all at once—like that—I took the fright! I did not want to take it, you may believe me, and I cannot tell you, no, I cannot, to this day, nor never, what it was frightened me so. It was just as if there were two people in the inside of me, and one of them laughed at the other and said, "Why, Murdough Blake, man alive, what the devil ails you to-day?" but the other he never answered a single word, only shook and shook till it seemed as if the clothes on my back would be all shaken to pieces.'

'And what did you do?' Grania asked, pausing in her stacking, and leaning upon her fork to listen.

'Well, then, I will tell you what I did, yes I will, Grania O'Malley. I just shut my eyes tight, and I rowed, and I rowed. How I rowed and my two eyes

shut tight, I cannot tell you, but I did. If I had opened them ever so little I made sure I should have seen—God alone knows what I would have seen, but something worse than any living man ever saw before. Once I heard a gull scream close to my head, and I screamed myself too, yes, I did, my faith and honour, never a word of lie. The clothes on my back they were wet as the sea itself with sweat, what with the fright and the way I was rowing, and when I got close to the rocks I just opened my eyes a little weeshy bit—like that—and peeped out between my eyelids, trembling all the while from head to foot with what I might see and saying every prayer I could remember, and—— Well! there was nothing there—nothing at all, no more than there is on the palm of my hand!’

And he opened it wide, dramatically to demonstrate his assertion.

This time Grania listened without any protest, mental or otherwise. Like every Celt that ever was born she perfectly understood these sudden unexplainable panics, more akin to those that affect sensitive animals, horses particularly, than anything often felt by more stolid and apathetic bipeds. Though not overflowing in words, as Murdough’s did, her imagination was perhaps even more alive than his to those dim formless visions which people the dusk, and keep alive in the Celt a sense of vague presences, unseen but realisable—survivals of a whole world of forgotten beliefs, unfettered by logic, untouched by education,

hardly altered even by later and more conscious beliefs, which have rather modified these earlier ones than superseded them.

The kelp fire was by this time made up, and after beating down the top of it so that it might keep alight all night, they turned and walked back together through the darkness. The wind, which had been rising for an hour past, blew with a dreary raking noise over the naked platforms. Stepping carefully, so as to avoid the innumerable fissures, slippery as the crevasses upon a glacier, they presently reached a narrow track, or 'bohereen,' which led between two lines of loosely-piled walls back to the neighbourhood of the O'Malleys' cabin.

It was almost absolutely pitch dark. Below them the sea was one vast indistinguishable moaning waste. A single tall standing stone—one of the many relics of the past which cover the islands—rose up against it like some vaguely-warning signpost. Stars showed by glimpses, but the clouds rolled heavily, and the night promised to be an unpleasant one.

Grania felt vaguely irritated and unhappy, she did not know why. That sense of elation with which she had run down over the rocks an hour ago had passed away, and was replaced by a feeling of discomfort quite as frequent with her as the other, especially when she and Murdough had been for some time together. Everything seemed to irritate her—the wind; the stones against which she stumbled; the clouds toss-

ing and drifting over her head; even the familiar moan of the sea had an unexplainable irritation that night for her ear. Looking up at him as he strode along beside her, a dim but substantial shadow in the darkness, this sense of intense, though causeless, vexation was especially strong. There were moments when it would have given her the deepest satisfaction to have fallen upon him and beaten him soundly then and there with her fists, so irritated was she, and so puzzled, too, by her own irritation. Of all this, fortunately, he knew and suspected nothing. His own private and particular world—the one in which he lived, breathed, and shone—was as far apart as the poles from hers. A vast untravelled sea stretched between them, and neither could cross from one to the other.

They parted at last upon the top of the ridge, close to the head of the sprawling monster which always lay there, half buried beneath the rocks, Murdough keeping straight on along the bohereen towards Alleenageeragh, Grania turning short off across the lower platform, which speedily brought her home.

CHAPTER V

HONOR was not asleep. Her cough had kept her awake ; the restlessness, too, and weariness of illness making it difficult for her to find any position endurable for more than a minute or two at a time.

Grania lifted her up and remade the bed. It was a fairly good one, consisting of a mattress stuffed with sea-grass, a small feather bed over that again, with blankets and a single sheet, coarse but clean. This done, and the sick woman settled again, she pulled off her own pampooties and stockings, unfastened her skirt, muttered a prayer, and tossed herself without further ceremony upon her own pallet.

The howl of the wind grew as the night wore on. It was not as loud as it often was, but it had a peculiarly teasing, ear-wearying wail. Now shrill and menacing ; now sinking into a whisper—an angry whisper filled with a deep sense of wrong and injury and complaint. Then, as if that sense of wrong was really too strong to be suppressed any longer, it swelled and swelled into a loud waspish tone—one which, like some scolding tongue, appeared to rise higher and higher

the less it was opposed ; then, when at its highest pitch, it would suddenly drop again to moanings and mutterings, full, it seemed, of impotent rage and dull unuttered malice.

Despite her day's work Grania could not sleep. She lay staring up at the blackened rafters, lit here and there by a dim reddish flicker from the almost dead turf. She could hear 'Moonyeen' stirring in her own private cabin hard by. Now and then came the rattle of her horns against a beam, or a pulling noise as the rope slipped up and down the stake to which it was tied. A stealthy scratching, apparently from a mouse, caught her ear, while Honor's laboured breathing, broken now and then by a hard, agonising cough, seemed to fill every pause left momentarily by the wind.

She was beginning to get drowsy, but she still saw the rafters and heard the scraping noise of the cow on the other side of the partition, only the rafters seemed to be part of a boat, and there were fish now amongst the hay, and nets and tackle dangling overhead. Murdough was there, throwing out a line, and turning round to tell her that he was going to be made king of Ireland. She herself was leaning over the boat's side, looking into the water, deeper, deeper, deeper, watching something like a red spark that was coming up nearer and nearer to meet her. And as it came close she saw that it was a red hat, and was upon the head of an old man, and then she knew that it was the *Fear Darrig*. She

tried to turn away her eyes, but could not, for they seemed caught somehow and dragged down. And Murdough shrieked, and pulled her petticoat to draw her back, but, when he found that he couldn't draw her back, he left off pulling, and got out of the boat, and ran away from her across the sea. Then she, too, tried to get out of the boat, and follow him over the water; but something held her fast, and she could only stretch out her arms to him and beg him to come back. But he never once turned his head, only ran faster and faster, and she could hear his feet going patter, patter, patter, and getting farther and farther away from her over the sea as he ran.

Suddenly she was wide awake, but that patter of footsteps was still going on. She could hear them quite distinctly—bare feet they seemed to be, moving across the flags outside rapidly and stealthily, as if some one was passing along under a heavy load. Her thoughts instantly flew to the stolen turf, and, leaping from her bed, she applied her face to the little narrow square of window which opened above it. She was not mistaken. The silhouette of a man's figure was clearly distinguishable, showing black for a moment against the white of the granite boulder beyond. He was close to the mouth of the gully when she first caught sight of him; another instant and he had passed beyond it, and it had swallowed him up from her sight.

Grania never hesitated. Barefooted as she was, her clothes hanging loosely around her, she opened the door

and ran down the track, calling to the man to stop. It was bound to be an invisible chase as long as she was in the gully, but she expected to see the thief, whoever he was, at the other end of it, and possibly to be able to catch him. To her surprise, however, when she emerged breathless on the other side of the gully not a living thing was to be seen. A flare of wild moonlight was gleaming upon the stunted thorn-bushes; the platform of rock on which she stood stretched away, grey and level, but living creature of any sort or kind there was none. Overhead the clouds swept to and fro in bewildering masses; the wind blew coldly; the moon, which for a moment had shone so vividly, disappearing suddenly between rolling clouds, so that the whole platform became indistinguishable.

Grania waited awhile, peering eagerly round into all the fissures, hoping for another gleam of moonlight which might enable her to discover the delinquent. Instead of this a violent storm of rain suddenly burst upon her as she stood there, drenching her to the skin in a moment. So sudden and violent was it, and so quickly had it followed the former gleam, that it had the effect of momentarily confusing her, almost as if it had formed part of her dream.

Reluctantly she turned and retraced her steps through the gully. To right and left as she now went up it the rain was beating with a furious pattering noise, dashing upon the flat rocks, shooting out in small spurts of spray, and forcing its way in all

directions through a thousand tortuous channels. As she emerged upon the other side of the gully it seemed to her that someone was moving stealthily in the direction from which she had come. There was so much noise around her, however, that it was impossible to make certain, and, after pausing for a moment, she came to the conclusion that she had been mistaken.

Turning once more before entering the cabin, it was curious to see how in an instant the whole ground, a minute before dry, had become converted into one vast streaming watercourse. Every little hole and fissure within sight was already choked with water, the supply from above coming down quicker than it could be disposed of, so that hollow groans and chuckles of imprisoned air were heard rising on all sides as from a seashore suddenly invaded by the advancing tide. It seemed as if the fierce little gully itself must at this rate be utterly dissolved and melted away to a mere pulp by the morning.

CHAPTER VI

BUT the atmospheric surprises of such spots as Inishmaan are inexhaustible. When next morning she again opened the cabin-door, leaving Honor asleep, the rain and storm had vanished utterly, and serenity reigned supreme over everything. The sky was such a sky as one must go to Ireland—nay, to west Ireland—to see : great rolling masses of clouds above, black or seemingly black by contrast with the pale opaque serenity beneath. Parallel with and immediately above the horizon spread a belt of sky filled with silvery clouds, pale as ghosts, rising one over the other, tier on tier, like the circles of some celestial amphitheatre. Now and then fragments of the darker region would detach themselves and go floating across this silvery portion, their shadows flung down one after the other as they went. Nowhere any direct sunlight, yet the play of light and shadow was endless ; tint following tint, line following line, shade following shade in an interminable gradation of light and movement. What gave tone and peculiarity to the scene was that, owing to the wetness of the rocks and to their absolute hori-

zontality, the whole drama of the sky was repeated twice over; the same shaft of light, seen first far off upon the most remote horizon, telling its story again and again with absolute faithfulness upon the luminous planes of rock as in a succession of enchanted mirrors.

Grania sat down on her accustomed seat, a bit of the upper ledge which ran close to the great boulder and just at the mouth of the gully. She had hardly slept at all, for Honor had awakened coughing, probably on account of the open door, and for hours her cough had hardly ceased, the oppression having been so great that twice it had seemed as if she must suffocate before relief came. Grania had accordingly sat the greater part of the night with her arm around her, supporting her in a sitting posture, and it was not till towards six o'clock that Honor had fallen into a doze, and that she had then been able to lie down.

She was tired out, therefore, as well as vexed by her unsuccessful chase of the night before, and her mind was now busily going over what was to be done about the turf. Already a large hole had been made in the rick, and if this went on there would not be enough left to carry them on till they got a fresh supply in the autumn. She ran over in her mind all the evil-doers of the island, trying to fix upon the one most likely to be the culprit. At first her thoughts had fixed themselves upon Shan Daly, the black sheep *par excellence*, and as it were officially, of Inishmaan.

But Shan Daly was believed to be away at present, though no one knew where, and on the whole she inclined to think that it was more likely to have been Pete Durane, who lived on the other side of the island, a little above Allinera, and whose record was by no means a blameless one in the matter of petty larceny. The figure of which she had momentarily caught a glimpse seemed more like that of Pete Durane, too, than of Shan. Having come to this conclusion she decided to go round to the Duranes' house that morning, and see if, in the course of conversation, any suspicious circumstances came to light. She also made up her mind to watch again herself that evening. Perhaps Murdough Blake would come and watch with her too. If so, they—

At this point a cough and faint stirring sound made itself heard from the cabin, and she got up and went in.

Honor was lying upon her back, her face drawn and white with the long conflict of the night. Her eyes opened, however, and turned, as they always did, with a loving look upon her sister as she entered. Grania lifted her up, propping her on her arm, and proceeded to arrange her for the day. There was only one pillow in the cabin, so that the foundation of the support by means of which she was enabled to sit erect had to be made with the aid of an old fishing kish, which Grania had adapted for the purpose. Raised upon this and the pillow over it, Honor could see quite

comfortably through the open door, here, as in every Irish cabin, the chief means of observation with the outer world.

The sun had now struggled through the clouds and shone in at the entrance with a sleepy radiance. In every direction the sound of tinkling water was to be heard, as the residue of last night's deluge dripped from a thousand invisible chinks, falling with a soft, pattering noise upon the platform which served as a sort of natural terrace to the cabin. Against the steep, wet sides of the gully the light broke in soft, prismatic gleams, which played up and down its fluted edges and over the big face of the boulder in an incessant dance of colour. The poor little weatherbeaten spot seemed filled for the moment to an almost unnatural degree with soft movement and tender, playful radiance.

Honor gazed at it all from her bed, an expression of vague yearning growing in her patient eyes.

Presently the brown sail of a hooker showed for a moment passing between the rocks in the direction of the mainland.

Her eyes turned to follow it till it had passed beyond their reach.

'That will be the Wednesday boat for Galway, Grania!' she said in a tone of mild excitement.

Grania was not looking. Her thoughts were still with the turf, and she was going over in her mind the plan for that evening's campaign. She would tell her

suspicious, she decided, to Murdough, and they would watch behind the big boulder, or perhaps at the bottom of the gully.

‘Maybe, sister,’ she replied indifferently. ‘It is up to the Duranes’ house I must be going this morning,’ she added presently. ‘And, Honor, it is not the kelp I need watch this evening. Will I—will I ask Murdough Blake to come over, and sit with us a bit? It is not for a long time, he says—no, not for a long, long time—that he has seen you.’

Honor suddenly reddened, and a curious look of embarrassment came into her face.

‘Well, then, honey sweet, of course you can,’ she said, but in a tone of such evident reluctance that Grania could not fail to observe it.

‘What is it ails you about Murdough?’ she asked curiously. ‘It is not the first time, not the first by many, that you did not want him to come here. Is it that you think anyway ill of him? Is it, Honor? Say, is it?’ she persisted anxiously.

‘Auch! child, no. Ill? Why would I think ill of him? ’Tis just—auch, ’tis just—’tis nothing in life but my own foolishness—nothing in life but that. Heart of my soul! what wouldn’t I do if you asked me? and of course he can come. But, ’tis just—Auch, ’tis laughing at me you’ll be, Grania—but you know when the fit takes me I must cough, and then the phlegm—and—and—well, ’tis shamed I am, dear, shamed outright to be sitting and spitting, you know,

and a young man looking at me. That's just it, and nothing else in life, only that!'

Grania stared at her for a second open-eyed, then she, too, reddened slightly. Such a reason would certainly never have dawned upon her mind. Modest she was—no girl more so—but she took far too sturdy and out-of-doors a view of life for any such fantastic notions of delicacy as this to trouble her—notions which could only, perhaps, lurk and grow up in such a nature as Honor's, conventual by instinct, and now trebly, artificially sensitive from ill-health. Honor's wishes were to be respected, however, even when they were mysterious.

'Well, indeed, sister, I never gave thought to that,' she replied humbly enough.

'Auch! and why would you give thought to it? Sure, why would a young colleen like you, that's niver known ache or sickness, think of such things no more than the young flowers out there coming up through the rocks?' the other answered with eager, loving tenderness. 'And my prayer to God and the Holy Virgin is that you never *may* have to think of them, Grania dheelish, alannah, acushla oge machree,' she went on coaxingly, heaping up one term of endearment upon another. She was afraid that her reason, although a perfectly true and, to her mind, a perfectly reasonable one, might somehow have offended Grania. With this idea she presently went on, having first waited long enough to regain her breath.

'Think ill of Murdough Blake? Wisha! of Mur-

dough Blake is it? a right *brine-oge* of a boy and a credit to all that owns him! A likely story that, when it is a joy to me to think of the two, him and yourself, coming and living here in the old house and I dead and gone—yes, indeed, and your little children growing up round you—my blessing and the blessing of Heaven be upon them, night and day, be they many or be they few! And if it was not the next thing to a sin, 'tis fretted and vexed I'd be to be stopping on in the way I am. What for? Only to be hindering two young creatures that's wanting and wishing to settle down, as is only natural, and they not able to do it, and all because of me! Sure, sister dear, 'tis begging your pardon I do be often inclined to do—yes, indeed, many's the time; only there—'tis God sends it you know, and it can't be different, whether or no.'

Grania's face had run through several variations while Honor was speaking. By the time she had finished, however, her eyes were gentle and misty.

'A right *brine-oge* of a boy,' the other continued complacently, smoothing down her blanket. 'And love is a jewel that's well known all the world over'—this observation cannot be said to have been uttered with any very fervent conviction, merely in the tone of one who utters an adage, sanctioned by usage, and therefore respectable—'tisn't every colleen, either, gets the one she likes best, so it isn't, and no trouble; nothing to do but to settle down, and all ready, no questions, nor money wanted, nor a thing. 'Tis hard for a girl

to have to marry a man and he nothing to her, or worse perhaps—a black stranger out of nowhere—and all for no reason but because of his wanting so many cows, or her father setting his mind on it, or the like of that. I mind me when I was a slip of a child—thirteen years old maybe, or less—there was a little girl—Mary O'Reilly her name was—barely seventeen years, no more; a soft-faced, yellow-haired little girsha, as slight and tender to look at as one of those fairy-ferns out there, when they come up first through the cracks. And there was a man belonging to Inisheer, whom they called Michael Donnellan—well, he wasn't, to say rightly, old, but he was a big, set-looking man, with a red hairy face on him, and a nasty look, somehow. Well, he and Mat Reilly—that's Mary O'Reilly's father—settled it up between them one night, over at the "Cruskeen Beg," and the number of cows fixed, and not a word, good or bad, only the wedding-day settled, and the priest told and all. As for Mary, all the notice she got was four days, not one more! and sure enough when the day came they all went over to Aranmore chapel, and married they were—a grand wedding—and back they came in the boats, and up to the house, and the height of eating and drinking going on, and the neighbours all asked in, and everything! I was looking in at the back window, by the same token, and half the other girshas in the place with me, and sorry I was, too, for I was fond of poor Mary O'Reilly, though I didn't rightly understand what

it all meant, being only a child at the time myself. Well, they were just setting out from the cabin, and the neighbours had all gathered round to bid them "God-speed!" when all at once poor Mary, that was standing there quiet and decent as a lamb, gave a sudden screech, and she ran and she twisted her arms round the top of the doorway, that had a little space, mind you, between it and the head of the door, so she could get her arm in. And when they went to unloose her she struck out at them and fought and kicked and bit—the innocent, peaceable creature that never lifted her hand to man or mouse before in her life!—and she cried out to them that she wouldn't leave her mammy, no, she would *not*, and that they might tear her into little pieces but she'd never loose hold of the door. Just think of it! the shame and the disgrace before the whole country! Her mother tried to unloose her, though she was crying fit to burst all the time herself. And the man that was her husband since the morning went up to her, and spoke rough to her—the beast!—and told her she must come with him at once. And she cried out that she would *not* go with him, no, not unless he took her away in little pieces, for that she hated the sight of him and his red face, and that she would kill herself, and him too, rather than go a foot with him! Och, *vo, vo*! that was a day—my God! that was a day! However, take her away with him he did, somehow or other, and ugly and sulky he looked in his new clothes, and his face redder than ever, being made such a

*baulyore*¹ before them all—and she crying and screaming to her mammy to keep her, and the old man holding back his wife that was fighting to get to her—and away with the two of them in a curragh to Inisheer, where he lived!’

‘And what did she do when he got her there? Did she kill him? ’Tis *I* would have killed him, no fear of me but I would!’ Grania exclaimed eagerly, her upper lip raised as she used to raise it when she was a child, showing the white teeth below.

‘“Kill him”? Arrah! nonsense, girl alive; the creature hadn’t it in her to kill a fly, no, nor the hundredth part of the half of a fly. What did she do? Sure, she did as every other woman has done since the world began; what else had she to do, God help her? Och, *vo, vo!* marrying is a black job for many and many a one, and so I tell you, child, though it’s little, I dare say, you believe me. I often think that it was seeing poor Mary that same day gave me the first strong turn against it myself—so I do,’ Honor ended meditatively.

Grania frowned till her brows met, but made no further comment on the story.

‘Yes, indeed, I do think that ’twas seeing Mary O’Reilly hanging on to that old door, and her mother crying and all, set me so against it then, I do really!’ Honor went on complacently. ‘It wasn’t that I couldn’t have married well enough if I had wanted it, mind you! There was an old man—you’ve often heard me talk of

¹ Laughing-stock.

him—up by Polladoo way; rich he was—oh, my God! he *was* rich!—nigh upon two cantrells of land he rented, not a foot less, and my father was mad with me to marry him—said once he'd turn me out of the house on to the bare sea rocks if I didn't! But your mother, Grania, that wasn't long in it then herself, helped me, so she did—may her bed in glory be the sweeter and the easier for it this day I pray! That was the worst time ever I had at all, at all!—the very worst time of all,' Honor added reflectively.

Grania looked up. A new idea, a sudden curiosity, was stirring in her mind.

'But did you never care for e'er a one, Honor?' she asked, reddening and speaking quickly: 'never for e'er a one at all not when you were young? Sure, Honor, you must! Think a bit, sister, and tell me. Arrah! why wouldn't you tell me? Isn't it all past and done now?'

'“Care”? Is it I, child? “*Care*”! God keep you, no! What would ail me to care?' the elder sister asked in tones of genuine astonishment. 'Auch! men is a terrible trouble, Grania, first and last. What with the drink and the fighting and one thing and another, a woman's life is no better than an old garron's down by the seashore once she's got one of them over her driving her the way he chooses.' She paused, and a new look, this time a look of unmistakable passion, came into her face. 'Oh, no, Grania asthore, 'tis a *nun* I would have loved to be; oh, my God! yes that *is* the beautiful life!

Pulse of my heart, sister avilish, there's nothing for a woman like being a nun—nothing, nothing! Praying and praying from morning till night, and nought to do, only what you're bid, and a safe fair walk before you to heaven, without a turn, or the fear of a turn, to right or left! Sure, 'tis all over now, as you say, but many's the time, och many's and many's the time, Grania, and for years upon years, I cried myself to sleep because I couldn't be a nun. 'Tis on that little bed you do be sleeping on now I'd be lying, and father and poor Phil, that's dead, snoring one against the other as if it was for money, and the wind blowing, and the sea and rocks grinding against each other the way they do, and I would think of the big world and the cruel things that do be going on in it, and the ugly ways of men that frightened me always, and then of the convent, and the chapel and the pictures and the garden—for I saw it all once, at Galway, at the Sisters of Mercy there—and my heart would go out in a great cry: "Oh, my God, make me a nun! Oh, my God, won't You let me be a nun? My God! my God! You'll let me be a nun, won't You? Arrah, my God! *won't* You? *won't* You?"

She lay back in the bed, her face flushed, her breath came fast; old passion was stirring vehemently within her. For such passion as this, however, Grania had no sympathy, Honor's aspirations in this respect having all her life been a source of irritation to her.

'Then it is not *myself* would like to be a nun,' she exclaimed defiantly. 'And I think it was real bad of

you, Honor, so I do, to have wanted to go away. What would have become of any of us without you, and of me most of all? Did you never think of that? Say, Honor, did you never think of that?’

‘Arrah! whist! child, I know it, I know it. You needn’t be telling me, for I’ve told myself so a hundred times,’ Honor answered eagerly. ‘And maybe it’s all for the best now the way it is; anyhow, the end is not far off, and God and the Holy Virgin will know it was not my fault. I had the heart in me to be a nun, if ever a woman had, and it’s the heart that’s looked to there—the heart and nothing else. And as to my not thinking of you! why, you little *rogora dhu*, you black rogue of the world, God forgive me if I’ve thought of anything else, child, since the first hour I had you to myself! ’Twasn’t in it nor thought of you were at all, in those times I’m speaking of, nor would have been but for father seeing your mother, a stranger come over from the Joyce country, dancing at old Malachy O’Flaherty’s wake, and all the young fellows in the place after her. What ailed him to think of marrying her *I* never could fancy! A man past forty years of age and a widower, too! An extraordinary thing and scarce decent! No fortune to her, neither, nothing but a pair of big black eyes—the very same as those two shining in your own head this minute—and the walk, so people said, of a queen. A good girl she was—I’m not saying anything against her, poor Delia—and I cried myself sick the day she died, for she was a kind friend to me. But there

was yourself, Grania, screeching and kicking, and making the devil's own commotion with wanting to be fed. Somehow, once I got you into my arms, and no one near you but myself, I disremember ever wanting again to be a nun, so I do.'

Grania's fierce look softened. "'Tis a mother you've been to me, sure enough, all my life, sister,' she said gently.

'"Mother"! Wisha! child, with your "mother"! 'Tisn't much *I* think of mothers, I can tell you! There's mothers enough in the world and to spare, too! Any-one can be a *mother*—small thanks to them! Oh, no, Grania sweet, acushla machree, love of my heart, 'tis your *soul*, 'tis the precious, precious soul of you that I've always wanted, and cried after, and longed for, ever since first I had you to myself. Sure, if I could only feel easy about *that* I'd die the happiest woman ever yet had a footboard laid on her face. Oh, my pet, my bird, my little deerfoor asthore, won't you try to turn to Him when I'm gone? Remember, I'll be near, maybe, though you won't see me. Sure, if it was to do you any good, I'd stop a hundred years longer than need be in the place Father Tom tells of, or a thousand either, for I don't mind pain, being so used to it, and think it all joy and sweetness.' Honor lifted her head a little in the bed and raised her soft brown eyes imploringly towards her sister. 'Oh, Grania dheelish, pulse of my soul, what's this life at all, at all, short or long, easy or hard—what is it, what is it but a dream? just a dream, no

better!’ she cried with sudden passion, that sisterly passion into which everything else had long been merged. ‘If I could only make sure of meeting my bird in heaven, if it was a thousand years off and a thousand on the top of that, and ten thousand more at the hinder end of that, sure, what would it matter? Oh, child ashore, think of us two, you and me, standing up there together, holding one another by the two hands, and knowing we’d never be separated no more! —never, never, sun or shine, winter or summer—never as long as God lived, and that’s for ever and ever! Oh, child, child! when that thought comes over me, ’tis like new life in my veins and new blood in my poor heart. I feel as if I could get out of my bed, and go leaping and dancing over the rocks to the sea, or up into the air itself like the birds, so I do.’

Her strength, momentarily sustained, suddenly broke down, and her voice sank so as to be almost inaudible. ‘You wouldn’t disappoint me, Grania, dear? Sure you wouldn’t disappoint your poor old Honor, that never loved man or woman, chick or child, only yourself?’ she whispered, the words coming out one by one with difficulty.

Grania’s eye filled, and she let Honor take her hand and hold it in her two worn ones, which were grown so thin that they seemed made of a different substance from her own toil-roughened one. But though she was touched and would have done anything to please Honor, she could not even pretend to respond to the sick

woman's eager longing. She would have done so if she could, but it was impossible. The whole thing was utterly foreign and alien to her. There was nothing in it which she could catch hold of, nothing that she could feel to attach any definite idea to. Fond as she was of Honor, unwilling as she was to vex her, her whole attitude, her excessive urgency, worried her. What ailed her to talk so, to have such queer ways and ideas? Was it because she was sick, because she was dying? Did all sick people talk and feel like that? Was it possible that *she* would ever feel anything of the sort if she were sick, if she were going to die? She did not believe it for a minute. The youth in her veins cried for life, life! sharp-edged life, life with the blood in it, not for a thin bloodless heaven that no one could touch or prove.

Turning away, she made an excuse, therefore, of having to go and see after the calf, and ran hastily out of the cabin-door into the sunlight, leaving it open behind her.

Left alone, Honor's eyes kept dreamily following the yellow bands of light as they spread in ever-widening streams across the rocks. Over the top of the gully she could see a space of sky, which seemed to her to be not only bluer, but also higher than usual. She tilted her head a little backwards so as to be able to look farther and farther up, higher and higher still, into this dim, mysterious distance, gradually forgetting all troubles,

vexations, hindrances, as her eyes lost themselves in that untravelled region.

‘ Auch, my God ! what will it be like at all, at all ! when we get there ? ’ she whispered, looking up and smiling, yet half abashed at the same time by her own audacity.

CHAPTER VII

At the extreme south-eastern end of the island, upon the same step or level of rock, but about half a mile farther on than the O'Malleys, lived the Duranes. Their cabin was the smallest and worst, next to Shan Daly's, on Inishmaan, but then they were Duranes, and Durane is one of the best established names on the island. The family consisted of a father, a mother, five children, a grandfather, and an orphan niece. There was only one room in the whole house, and that room was about twenty feet long by twelve or perhaps fourteen feet wide. The walls had, seemingly, never been coated with plaster, and even the mortar between the blocks of stone had fallen out, and been replaced from the inside by lumps of turf or mud as necessity occurred.

When the family were collected together, space, as may be guessed, was at a premium, since even upon the floor they could hardly all sit down at the same time. There was, however, a sort of ledge, covered with straw, about three feet from the ground, upon which four of the five children slept, and where, when food was being

distributed, all that were old enough to sit alone were to be seen perched in a row, with tucked-up legs and open mouths, like a brood of half-fledged turkeys. At other times they gathered chiefly upon the doorstep, which, in all Irish cabins, is the coveted place, and only ceases to be so in exceptionally cold weather, or after actual darkness has set in.

There was no land belonging to the cabin beyond a strip of stony potato-ground, and Peter, or Pete, Durane was forced therefore to earn what he could as day-labourer to his luckier neighbours. Not much employment was given, as may be imagined, on Inishmaan, and had there been Pete would hardly have been able to profit by it. He was a thin, dried-up little man, looking old already, though he was not yet forty, with soft, appealing eyes and a helpless, vacillating manner. His wife Rose, or Rosha, on the contrary, though in reality a year or two older than himself, was a fine-looking woman still, with hard red cheeks and round black eyes, who had only accepted him, as she often loudly asserted, for the sake of charity, and to hinder the creature from throwing himself into the sea.

Poor Pete had certainly not been regarded as the pearl of bachelors, and had had to seek far and ask often before finding anyone willing to accept him. He was a well-meaning, harmless little man, full of the best intentions, and incapable of hurting a fly. Unfortunately for himself he bore a poor reputation in the somewhat important matter of honesty, and it was this that had

made Grania think of him in connection with the stolen turf.

About a year before there had been a scandal about some straw which had been missed by one of the neighbours, and which was finally traced to Pete's door, and although the amount taken had been a trifle, still in so small and so poverty-stricken a community as Inishmaan small things, it will be understood, are readily missed. No steps had been taken to prosecute the culprit—indeed, the ties of kindred are so closely woven and interwoven all over the island that the law is rarely resorted to. The straw had been duly returned to the owner's door early one morning, and it was one of the many jokes against Pete Durane that he had been soundly thrashed by his wife for the theft—possibly because of the detection of it.

When Grania entered, the children were still eating their midday meal, an old table having been pushed against their ledge for the purpose—a very old table, almost shapeless from years of ill-usage, but still solid, and the chief article of furniture in the house. Rosha was busily ladling out a fresh supply of potatoes from the big black pot, laying them down in heaps upon the table in sizes varying according to the age, or possibly the merits, of the recipient. They were not allowed to get cold, the children snatching them up and beginning to eat them almost before they were out of the pot.

What with the all but total absence of glass in the paper-patched windows, and what with the smouldering

eddies of turf-smoke which rolled overhead like some dull, domestic cloud, it was at first so dark that Grania could see nothing except the piles of potatoes and the children, or rather the children's hands, which, being fitfully lit by the fire, kept darting into the light and out again, like things endowed with some odd galvanic existence of their own. After awhile, as her eyes got more accustomed to the atmosphere, she made out that besides the mistress of the house there were two other women sitting there, one of them an aunt of Rosha's from the opposite side of the island, the other our previous acquaintance, Peggy Dowd, who had dropped in as usual about meal-time.

No sooner was that meal snatched up and swallowed down than the children rushed out of doors again in a body, tumbling one over the other as they did so, the eldest girl clutching up her mother's flannel petticoat as she went. A spare petticoat—one, that is to say, not invariably worn upon the person of the mistress of the house—is a highly important article in an Irish cabin, and fulfils more functions than could be guessed at first sight. It is a quilt by night, a shawl by day, a head-gear, an umbrella for an entire brood of children to run out under in the rain—nay, the man of the house himself will often not disdain to take a turn of it, especially on occasions which do not bring him too directly into the light of publicity. This last, by the way, was a privilege which poor Pete Durane had never dared to claim.

Even after the children had been got rid of, Grania felt it impossible for her to enter upon the subject of her visit—a delicate one in any case—while there were strangers present. Accordingly she did not remain in the cabin many minutes, contenting herself with begging Rosha to ask Pete to come over and speak to her that evening as soon as his day's work was finished.

CHAPTER VIII

HER silence did not hinder her from becoming the subject of vigorous controversy and criticism the instant her back was turned.

‘Auch, my word, just look at the length of her! My word, she is the big girl that Grania O’Malley, the big girl out and out!’ Rosha exclaimed, looking after her as she ran down the steep path, her tall, vigorous figure framed for a few minutes by the doorway of the room she had just left. ‘It is the mighty queer girl that she is, though! God look down upon us this day, but she is the queerest girl ever I knew on this earth yet, that same Grania O’Malley. Yes, indeed, *yes!*’ A long-drawn smack of the palate gave emphasis and expansion to the words.

‘Auch, Rosha Durane, don’t be overlooking the girl! ’Tis a decent father’s child she is, any way,’ said the aunt from the other side of the island, apparently from an impulse of amiability, in reality by way of stimulating Rosha to a further exposition of what Grania’s special queerness consisted in.

‘Did I say Con O’Malley was not a decent man?’

Saints make his bed in heaven this day, when did I say it?' the other answered, apparently in her turn in hot indignation, but in reality perfectly understanding the motive of her aunt's remark. 'What I do say, and what is well known to all Inishmaan, and that it is no invention of mine nor yet thought of by me, is that he was a very wild queer man. And Grania is just the same; she is a very wild queer girl, and a bold one too, and so I suppose I may say even in my own house, and before you, Mrs. O'Flanagan, though you *are* my poor mother's sister, that's these seven years back gone to glory! I tell you there is no end to her queerness, and to the bold things she does be doing. It is well known to all Inishmaan, yes, and to Aranmore too, that she goes out to the fishing just like a man, so she does, just like a man, catching the plaice and the mullets and the conger eels, and many another fish beside I shouldn't wonder; and if that is not a very bold thing for a young girl to do, then I do not know what a bold thing is, although I *am* your own niece, Mrs. O'Flanagan. But that is only the half of it. She has no fear of anything, not of anything at all, I tell you, neither upon the earth nor under it either—God keep us from speaking of harm, amen! She will as soon cross a fairies' ring as not! just the same and sooner, and it is not two months, or barely three at the most, that I saw her with my own eyes walk past a red jackass on the road, and it braying hard enough to split at the time, and not crossing herself, no, nor a bend of the head, nor spitting even! It is

the truth I am telling you, Mrs. O'Flanagan, ma'am, though you may not choose to believe me, the truth and no lie !'

'Ugh ! ugh ! ugh ! 'Tis a bad end comes to such ways as those, a bad end, a bad end,' said old Peggy Dowd, who up to this had been busily occupied in eating up the scraps left in the pot, but had now leisure to take her part, and accordingly entered upon the subject with all the recognised weight of her years and authority. 'Did I ever tell you women both about Katty O'Callaghan, that lived over near Aillyhaloo when I was a girl ? From the time she was the height of that turf kish there she would not be bid by anyone, no, not by the priest himself. The first time ever I saw her she was close upon eighteen years old, for she was not born on the island, but came from Cashla way to help an uncle of hers that had a small farm up near Aillyhaloo. A fine big girl she was, just the moral of that Grania there, with a straight back, and a wide chest, and the two eyes of her staring up big and bold at you—the very same. But, Man Above, the impudence of her ! She had no proper respect not for anything, so she had not. She would laugh when you talked of the good people, and she would say that she would as soon go up at night to the Phooka's hole as not, which everyone knows is all but the same as death. As for the *cohullen druith*, with my own two ears I heard her say she did not believe that there was such a thing ! though my grandfather, God save his soul ! saw one once on the head of a merrow

hard by the Glassen rock. But, faith! I haven't the time nor the strength to be telling you the half of her folly and nonsense, nor couldn't if I took the night to do it! Anyhow, there she was straight and strong, a fine handsome girl just like that Grania there; and her uncle was to give her two cows when she married, and her father at Cashla, I heard too there was talk of his giving something, I don't know whether it was pigs or what. In any case there was nothing to hinder her settling, only you may guess if any decent quiet-reared boy would like to go marrying a wife with such ways and such talk in her mouth as that same Katty O'Callaghan! However, she was bid for at last by a harmless easy-going young fellow of the name of Phil Mulcahy, and married him, and went up to live a quarter of a mile or so beyond Aillyhaloo, at the edge of the big west cliff yonder, and a year after she had a child, as fine a boy at the start as you'd see in a day's walk. Well, you may think she was going to get off clean and clever after her goings on; but not a bit of it—so just wait till you hear. One day she went down the rocks by Mweeleenareeava for the sea-wrack, and I dare say she was carrying on as usual with her nonsense and folly; anyway, when she got back the first thing she noticed was that the child looked mighty queer, and seemed shrunk half its size, and its face all weazened up like a little old man's, and the eyes of it as sharp and wicked as you please. Well, women both of you, from that hour that creature grew smaller and smaller, and queerer

and queerer, and its eyes wickedder and wickedder, and the bawl never out of its mouth, and it wanting the breast night and day, and never easy when it got it either, but kicking and fighting and playing the devil's own bad work. Of course the neighbours saw right enough what had happened, and told Katty plainly the child was changed—and why not? Sure who could wonder at it after her goings on, which were just as if she'd laid them out for that very purpose! But she wouldn't hear a word of it, so she wouldn't, and said it was the teeth, or the wind in its stomach, and God only knows what nonsense besides. But one day a woman was coming along from Aillinera to Aillyhaloo, a real right-knowing woman she was by the name of Nora Cronohan, and as she was going she stopped to ask for a potato and a sup of milk, for she was stravoging the country at the time. So she looked up and down the cabin, and presently she cast eyes on the creature which was laid in a basket by the fire, that being the place it stayed easiest in, and—

“Arrah! what's that you've got at all in there?” says she, staring at it, and it staring back at her with its two eyes as wicked as wicked.

“My child, what else?” says Katty, speaking quite angrily.

‘With that the woman gave a screech of laughter so that you could have heard her across the Foul Sound with the wind blowing west, and “Your child!” says she. “Your child! Sure, God save you, woman,

you might as well call a black *arth-looghra* a salmon any day in the week as that thing there a child!"

'Well, Katty was going to throw her into the sea, she was so mad! But first she looked at the basket, and with that she began to shake and tremble all over, for the creature was winking up so knowing at her, and opening and shutting its mouth as no Christian child in this world or any other ever would or could.

"Why, what ails it now, at all, at all?" says she, turning to the other, and her face growing as white as the inside of a potato.

"Listen to me, woman," says Nora Cronohan, holding up her hand at her. "That's not your child at all, you ignorant creature, as anyone can see, and there's but two ways for you to get your own right child back again. You must either take that up the next time there's a south wind blowing and set it to roast on the gridiron with the door open, or if you won't do that you must gather a handful of the *boliaun bwee* and another handful of the *boliaun dhas*, and put them down to boil, and boil them both in the pot for an hour, and then throw the whole potful right over it; and if you'll do either of those things I'll be your warrant but it will be glad to be quit of you, and you'll get your own fine child again!"

'Well, you'd think that would be enough for any reasonable woman! But no. Katty wouldn't do either the one thing nor the other, but held to it that it was her own child, not changed at all, only sick;

such fool's talk ! as if anyone with half an eye, and that one blind, couldn't have told the difference ! She had ne'er another child, you see, nor the sign of one, and that perhaps was what made her so set on it. Anyhow the neighbours tried to get her to see reason, and her husband, too, though he was but a poor shadow of a man, did what he could. At last her mother-in-law, that was a decent well-reared woman, and knew what was right, tried to get at the creature one day when Katty was out on the rocks, so as to serve it the right way, and have her own fine grandchild back. But if she did Katty was in on her before she could do a thing, and set upon the decent woman, and tore the good clothes off her back, and scratched her face with her nails so that there was blood running along her two cheeks when the neighbours came up, and but for their getting between them in time, God knows but she'd have had her life. After that no one, you may believe, would have hand, act, or part with Katty Mulcahy ! Indeed, it soon came to this, that her husband durstn't stop with her in the cabin, what between her goings on and the screeches of the creature, which got worse and worse till you could hear them upon the road to Ballintemple, a good half-mile away. Yarra ! the whole of that side of the island got a bad name through her, and there's many doesn't care even now to walk from Aillinera to Aillyhalco, specially towards evening, not knowing what they might hear !

‘ Well, one day—’ here the narrator paused, looked first at one and then at the other of her listeners, coughed, spat, twitched the big cloak higher round her shoulders, and settled herself down again in her chair with an air of intense satisfaction. ‘ One day, it was a desperate wild afternoon just beginning December, and the wind up at Aillyhaloo enough to blow the head of you off your two shoulders. Most of the people were at home and the houses shut, but there were a few of us colleens colloquing together outside the doors, talking of one thing and another, when all of a sudden who should come running up the road but Katty Mulcahy, with the bawl in her mouth, and a look on her face would frighten the life out of an Inishboffin pig.

“ Och ! och ! och ! ” says she, screeching. “ Och ! och ! och ! my child’s dying ! It’s got the fits. It’s turning blue. Where’s Phil ? Where’s its father ? Run, some of you, for God’s sake, and see if he’s in yet from the fishing.’

‘ Well, at first we all stared, wondering like, and one or two of the little girshas ran off home to their mothers, being scared at her looks. But at last some of us began laughing—I was one that did myself, and so I tell you women both—you see we knew of course all the time that it wasn’t her own child at all, only a changeling, and that as for Phil he had never been near the fishing, but was just keeping out of the way, not wishing, honest man, to be mixed up with any

such doings. Well, when she heard us laughing she stopped in the middle of her screeching, and she just gave us one look, and before anyone knew what was coming there she was in the very thick of us, and her arms going up and down like two flails beating the corn!

‘Och, Mary Queen of Heaven, but that was a hubbuboo! We turned and we run, and our blood was like sea-water down our backs, for we made sure we’d carry the marks of her to our graves, for she had a bitter hard hand, and God knows I’m speaking the truth, had Katty Mulcahy when you roused her! Well, at the screams of us a heap more people came running out of the houses, and amongst them who should put his head out of one of the doors but Phil Mulcahy himself, with no hat to his head and a pipe to his mouth, for he had no time to take it out, and she thinking, you know, he was away at the fishing!

‘At that Katty stood still like one struck, and the eyes of her growing that round you’d think they must fall out of her head, so big were they, and her mouth working like a sea pool in the wind. And presently she let out another bawl, and she made for him! I was the nearest to him, and there was some three or four more between the two, but you may believe me we didn’t stop long! It was something awful, women both, and so I tell you, to see her coming up the road with that rage on her face, and it as white as the foam on the sea. Phil stood shaking and shaking, staring

at her and his knees knocking, thinking his hour was come, till just as she was within touch of him, when he turned and he ran for his life. He ran and he ran, and she ran after him. Now there's no place at all, as everyone knows, to run on that side of Aillyhaloo only along by the cliff, for the rest is all torn and destroyed, with great cracks running down God knows where to the heart of the earth. So he kept along by the edge, and she after him, and we after the two of them presently to see the end of it. Phil ran as a man runs for his life, but Katty, she ran like a woman possessed! Holy Bridget! you could hardly see the feet of her as she raced over the ground! The boys cried out that she'd have him for sure, and if she had caught him and this rage still on her God knows she'd have thrown him over the cliff, and you know 'tis hundreds of feet deep there, and never an inch of landing. Poor Phil thought himself done for, and kept turning and turning, and far away as he was now we could see the terror on the face of him, and we all screeched to him to turn away from the edge, but he did not know where he was going, he was that dazed. Well, she was just within grip of him when she stopped all at once as if she was shot, and lifted her head in the air like that! Whether she heard something, or what ailed her I can't tell, but she gathered herself up and began running in the opposite way, not along by the sea but over the rocks, the nearest way back to her own house. How she got across nobody knows, for the

cracks there are something awful, but you'd think it was wings she had to see the leaps she threw in the air, for all the world like a bird! Anyhow, she got over them at last, and into her house with her, and the door shut with a bang you might have heard across the Sound at Killeany.

'Nobody, you may believe me, troubled to go after her or near her *that* night, and the wind being so cold, after a bit we all went home, and Phil, too, by-and-by come creeping back, looking like a pullet that had had its neck wrung, and the boys all laughing at him for being 'fraid of a woman—as if it was only a woman Katty was, with that black look on her face and she leaping and going on as no woman in this world ever could, if she was left to herself! That night there was no more about it one way or another, nor the next morning either, but by the middle of the afternoon a man that was passing brought us word that he heard a noise of hammering inside of the house. Well, at that we all wondered what was doing now, and some said one thing and some another. But a boy—a young devil's imp he was by the name of Mick Carroll—peeped in at the end window and came running up to say he had seen something like a coffin standing on the floor, only no bigger he said than the top of a keg of butter. Well, that was the queerest start of all! For who, I ask you both, could have made that coffin for her, and what could she have wanted with a coffin either? For you're not so ignorant, women, either

of you, as need to be told there wouldn't be anything to put into it! 'Twasn't likely that thing she had in the house with her would stop to be put into any coffin! 'Tis out of the window or up the chimney it would have been long before it came to that, as everyone knows that knows anything. Anyhow, 'twas the truth it seems he told, for the very next day out she came from the house herself, and the coffin or the box or whatever it was under her arm, and carried it down did she sure enough to the shore, and paid a man handsome to let her put it in a curragh—as well she'd need, and him losing his soul on her!—and away with her to Cashla over the “Old Sea”! And whether she found a priest to bury it for her is more than I can tell you, but they *do* say out there on the Continent they're none so particular, so long as they get their dues. As for Phil, he went over only the very next week to her father's house, the poor foolish innocent creature, but all he got for his pains was a pailful of pig's wash over his head, and back he came to Inishmaan complaining bitterly, though it was thankful on his two knees to Almighty God he ought to have been it was no worse, and so we all told him. However, there was no putting sense into his head, and not a word would he say good or bad, only cried and talked of his Katty! Lucky for him his troubles didn't last very long, for the next thing we heard of her was that she was dead, and about a year after that, or maybe two years, he married a decent little girl, a cousin of my own, and

took her to live with him up at the house at Aillyhaloo. And, but that he was killed through having his head broke one dark night by Larry Connel in mistake for the youngest of the Lynches, 'tis likely he'd be in it still! Anyway, he had a grand wake, the finest money could buy, for Larry Connel, that had always a good heart, paid for it himself, and got upon a stool, so he did, and spoke very handsomely of poor Phil, so that Molly Mulcahy the widow didn't know whether it was crying she should be or laughing, the creature, with glory! And for eating and drinking and fiddling and jig-dancing, it was like nothing either of *you* ever saw in your lives, and a pride and satisfaction to all concerned. But,'—here Peggy Dowd hitched her cloak once more about her shoulders and spat straight in front of her with an air of reprobation—'but—there was never a man, nor yet a woman either, living upon Inishmaan at the time, that would have danced one foot, and so I tell you, women both—not if you'd have *paid* them for doing it—at *Katty* Mulcahy's wake.'

CHAPTER IX

THE two listeners remained silent a minute after the tale had ended. Peggy Dowd filled her pipe and puffed at it solemnly, with the air of one who has fulfilled a social duty and sustained a widely-known reputation. Suddenly Mrs. Durane, glancing towards the door, uttered an ejaculation of annoyance.

‘My conscience! if there is not that Pete Durane! God help the world, but he’s back early from his work this day!’

Almost before she had finished the words the little man came suddenly round the doorway into the cabin, hardly finding room to enter his own house owing to the three women, two of them in their big woollen cloaks, who already filled it to the very walls. His face wore a deprecating smile, which hardly ever left it, and which was the more noticeable from the absence of most of his front teeth. His hair, unlike that of most Irishmen of his rank, was very thin, so that he had the effect of being almost bald, and this, with his short stature, bent back, and hesitating air, gave a general look of feebleness and ineffectiveness to his whole aspect. A

poor *pittioque* his wife called him, and as he stood there her two friends mentally endorsed the description.

‘Well now, well now, is this yourselves? Bless me, ladies, but ’tis the proud man I am to see you in my poor house,’ he exclaimed as he entered. ‘Yes, indeed, Mrs. O’Flanagan, ma’am! and how is that good man your husband? and your fine girl, too? But it is a sight to see her coming up the road, so it is!’

‘Och! Pete Durane, get along then, with your fine speeches,’ said his wife irritably. ‘What a murrain brings you back at this time of day? Is it to torment me before you need you’re wanting?’

‘Arrah, don’t be speaking to him like that, Rosha Durane!’ said the aunt from the other side of the island, with a short derisive laugh. ‘I tell you, Pete, there has been a very fine girl asking for you yourself, this day, so there has. Och, but a fine girl, as fine as any in Inishmaan. Saints alive! but ’twas herself was disappointed not to find you within. “Will he come to see me this evening, do you think, Mrs. Durane?” says she, putting her head on one side. “’Tis the unfortunate colleen I am to miss him,” says she. So you may be the proud man, Pete Durane, then you may!’

Poor Pete’s face got as red as his wife’s petticoat. His susceptibility was one of the many standing jokes upon Inishmaan, where jokes were rare, and once started lasted long. It was quite true. By one of those humorous freaks of which nature is fond, while his handsome stalwart contemporaries were all but invul-

nerable in this respect, the poor little *pittioque* was known to be intensely susceptible to the tender passion. It had made him a slave all his life to his wife Rosha, and even now, after years of consistent ill-usage on her part, he was still slavishly devoted to her, and took her buffets, physical no less than verbal, with all the meekness of an attached and well-broken-in house-dog.

‘Ugh! ugh! ’tis going I must be,’ old Peggy Dowd said suddenly, struggling to rise from her low seat. ‘Will you put the cloak around me, Mrs. Durane, ma’am, if you please? Ugh! ugh! ’Tis myself is scarce fit to walk back alone, so I am not.’

‘Will I send the girl Juggy Kelly with you to help you up the hill? Yes, indeed, but it is a great help, so it is. You must make her go behind you and push—push hard. Trouble? Och! what are the young people for if not to be of some good to those that’s better and older than themselves? But where is she, that girl Juggy Kelly? It is always out of the way she is when she is wanted. Run, Pete, run out down the road and look for her. Quick, man, don’t be standing there like a stuck pig over against the door, taking up all the light.’

Then, as the obedient Pete flew off hatless down the path—‘It is not known the trouble I have had with that girl!’ Mrs. Durane continued, turning for sympathy to her friends. ‘Would you believe it, Mrs. O’Flanagan, ma’am, ’tis sleeping with the chickens now

she complains of! There is not a morning of her life but she comes to me with her face all scratched, crying and saying she'll not stop in it. "Then don't," says I; "go sleep with the crows if you like, since the chickens won't serve you." That is what I say; yes, indeed! such impudence!

'Och! there is no satisfying the young people, do what you will for them these times,' Mrs. O'Flanagan replied sympathetically. 'Did you hear of young Macdara Kilbride—Manus Kilbride's eldest son, him that's just back from America?—it is not into his own father and mother's house he will go almost, so it is not. "Phew! phew!" says he; "why, what a lot of smoke!" And so there is some smoke, and why would there not be? It is a very good house, Mary Kilbride's house is, there is no better house in all Inishmaan. It is true it is built on a bit of a slope, and the door is at the top, so that the rain comes into it in wet weather; God He sends the rain, and it is a very bad season for Inishmaan when He does not send enough—oh yes, a very bad season, everyone knows that. But Macdara Kilbride is just so. His feet do be sticking in the floor of the house, he says, every time he crosses it. It is a soft floor, there is no denying that, and the chimney never was a good one to draw, being fallen in a good deal at the top, and the stones off. But, Man Above! does he think his father can be going into Galway every day in the week for more bricks? Besides, it is a good house; a very good house is Mary Kilbride's.'

‘Ugh! ugh! what did I tell you just now? ’Tis the same everywhere. Young people they are the same, all the same; there is no good in them at all, so there is not!’ Peggy Dowd again spat vigorously into the fire to emphasise her disgust, then hitched her big cloak about her shoulders, and began preparing with many groans and wheezing sighs to depart without the aid of her proffered assistant.

Just as she had hobbled across to the doorway it was again filled by a figure, and the elder Durane, Pete’s father, came in.

He was a curious contrast to his insignificant-looking little son. A tall, stately old man, with that peculiarly well-bred air not unfrequently still to be seen amongst the elder Irish peasants. His white hair was very thick, and hung over his forehead and around his hat in a dense silky thatch. His eyes were drooping and tired-looking, and his whole air that of a man who has done his work in the world, and asks for nothing now but to be left in peace. By an arrangement common enough in the west of Ireland, when the parent is old, and the son or sons married, he had surrendered all ownership in the house and all rights of possession, with a few trifling exceptions. The single stuffed chair, for instance, was his, so was the one drinking-glass, and an old two-handled black oak mether bound with brass, a relic this of unknown antiquity. These and a few similar articles of personal use were his own private property, and to these he clung punctiliously, and in

case of a dispute would doubtless have defended them to the death.

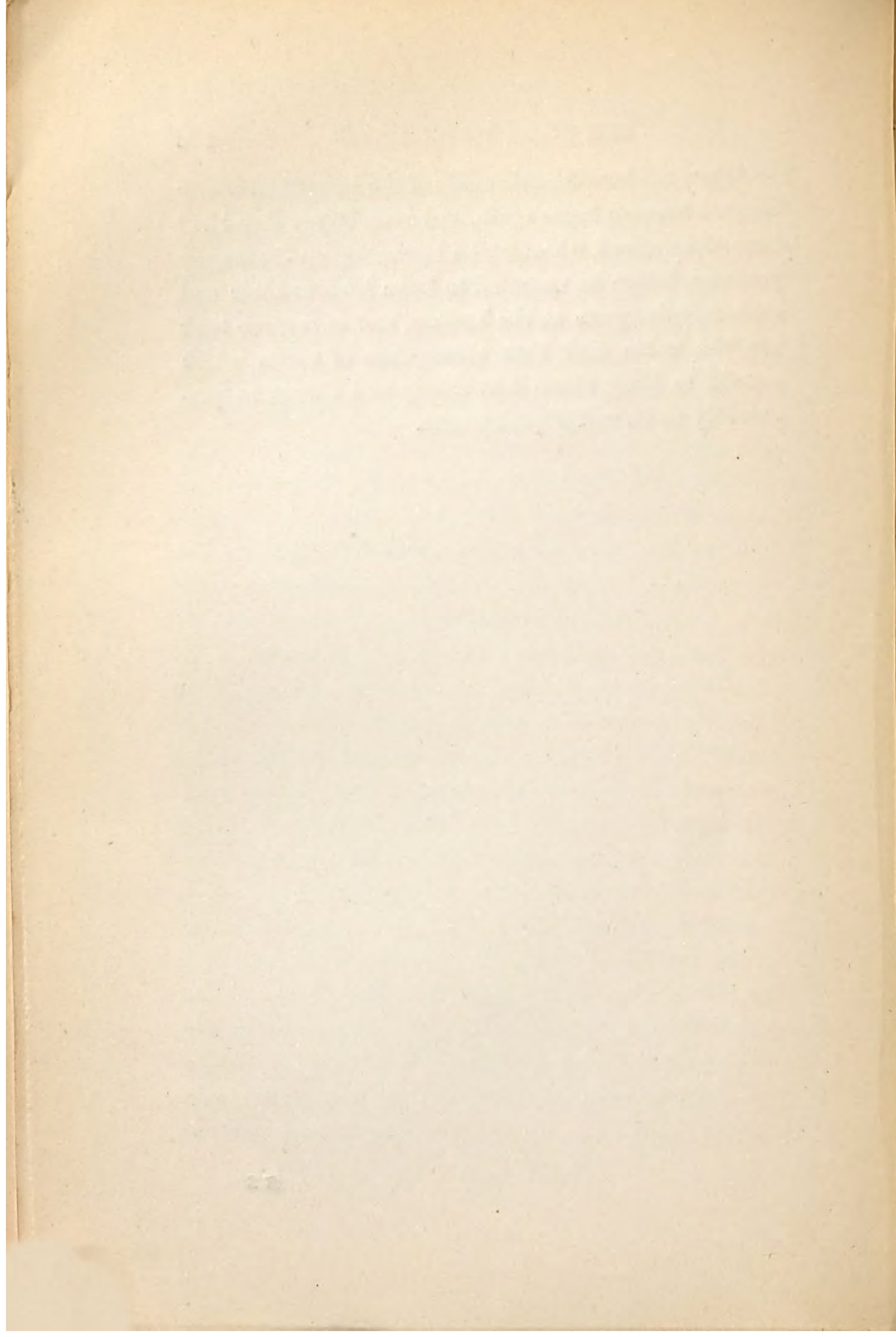
On the whole his daughter-in-law and he got on better than might have been expected. Rosha, to tell truth, was rather in awe of her father-in-law. His old-world politeness, combined with a certain power he occasionally showed of being uncomfortably caustic if provoked, were not without effect upon the rough-tongued, coarse-natured woman. In the endless domestic storms between her and her husband—storms, it must be said, which raged almost exclusively on one side—old Durane never took his son's part, though often appealed to by that much-bullied person to do so. On the other hand he had a way of dreamily watching Rosha as she raged about the cabin which had more effect upon the virago than might have been expected from so very negative a form of attack. He now stood perfectly silent upon the threshold, and having politely removed his hat, bent his white head first to one and then to the other of the visitors, leaning as he did so upon the big black stick which he held in his hand. He was still in the same attitude when his son Pete returned hastily, without the girl he had been sent for, but dragging two of the children after him by the hand.

‘Augh, then, Pete Durane, will you never get the sense?’ his wife exclaimed furiously. ‘Who bade you bring back the children, and they sent out on purpose? Pulling them up the rocks, too, like that, and Patsy smoking red with the heat this minute, the creature’—

passing her hand over her offspring's forehead, and turning the palm round to the company to prove her assertion. 'Auch, Mr. Durane, sir, but it is the fool you have for a son, God love you! yes, indeed, the very biggest fool on all Inishmaan, and it was myself was the next biggest ever to go and marry him, so I was, God knows.'

The elder Durane looked at his son, and then at his daughter-in-law, an air of vague disturbance beginning to cloud his face, but he said nothing. Then, equally silent, his eyes began to wander slowly round the cabin, as if he were calculating the probabilities of any food being forthcoming. Not seeing signs of anything of the sort at present, he again lifted his hat with the same air of dreamy civility, and backing cautiously out of the doorway, beyond which he had not yet ventured, retraced his steps a little way down the pathway, until he had reached a spot where the planes of rock had got accidentally worn away into the likeness of a sort of roughly-hewn arm-chair. Here he seated himself, his legs stretched out in front of him, his eyes beginning, evidently from long habit, to seek out one particular spot in the far-reaching, dull-tinted horizon. Gradually as he did so the serenity, disturbed by Rosha's appeal and by the general sense of disturbance which was apt to surround that vigorous woman, returned to his face, a look of reminiscence, undefined but on the whole pleasurable, settling down upon his handsome weather-beaten old features.

The aunt from the other side of the island had nearly reached her own home again, and even Peggy Dowd had long disappeared, wheezing and grunting up the craggy pathway, before he ventured to leave his arm-chair and contemplative gaze at the horizon, and once more seek out the cabin and that atmosphere of storm which seemed to hang about it as closely and almost as persistently as its veil of peat smoke.



PART III

MAY TO AUGUST

CHAPTER I

THUS the weeks went on, one week after the other, all exactly alike, and no new light came to aid Grania in her investigations about the stolen turf. What was hardly less important, however, the depredations themselves ceased. From the night on which she had pursued the thief through the gully and lost him at the mouth of it, no fresh inroads, so far as she could discover, had been made in the stack, and, this being the case, she was content for the present to let the matter be. She had a kindly feeling towards poor Pete Durane, and if he were the culprit would have been sorry to have been forced to bring the guilt home to him. If, on the other hand, it was Shan Daly—the only other person she could think of as likely to be guilty—though she hated that miscreant as she hated no other person in the world, still, there was his wretched wife to be thought of, and his equally wretched family. As well, too, hope

to extract blood from flints as get any satisfaction or compensation out of Shan Daly, and, as for the mere vindictive pleasure of punishment, the ties of kinship and acquaintanceship are far too closely drawn in so limited a community as Inishmaan for that sort of pleasure to be often resorted to. If we were on visiting terms with the families of our pickpockets and burglars, those artists would be even less interrupted in the exercise of their vocations than they are at present.

Meanwhile the work of the year had to be gone on with. Grania was feeding up a calf, as well as two pigs, to be sold at the Galway spring fair. The freight charges from Inishmaan to Galway were serious—not less than half-a-crown for every calf and a shilling apiece for the pigs; whereas the freight charges to Ennistimon were much less; but, then, the chances of a good sale at the Galway fair were considerably greater, and, on the whole, therefore, she had decided to send them there.

Her other work was now lighter, for there was nothing to be done to the potatoes till autumn, and she had hardly any oats. In the Aran isles the land is divided into townlands, every townland containing so many 'quarters,' every quarters so many 'croggeries,' every croggery so many acres. Inishmaan possesses but two townlands, containing six quarters each, with sixteen croggeries to every quarter, and sixteen acres to every croggery. Grania and Honor held a little over one croggery, six acres of which was pure stone, leaving

some ten or eleven to be reckoned upon. Of these, half were laid down in potatoes, while the remainder served as pasturage, eked out, of course, with a good deal of surreptitious aid from the bent-grass below.

As for the weather, it seemed to be getting daily worse. So wet and miserable a spring had rarely been experienced, even upon Inishmaan. To rain in moderation, nay, something more than moderation, no Aranite, as explained, objects, but, even of the best thing, it is just possible to have too much, and such incessant deluges as followed day after day, and night after night, were this year beyond the recollection of the oldest inhabitant. If the destiny of the islands was sooner or later to be washed away and to vanish from sight in the sea, it seemed as if now was the time that destiny was likely to be fulfilled. The rain came down in literal sheets, and in sheets it swept over the surface. There being no earth for it to dry into, it poured over the level slabs, sweeping from slab to slab almost as the sea swept over the rocks between the tide-marks. Watching it at such moments, it would have seemed to you as if the whole island would shortly become one great waterfall, or scarcely perceptible reef for the Atlantic to roll over, the water, as it descended upon the slabs, falling into the troughs or tunnels laid ready for it, and out of them again until it found rest in the final trough awaiting it at the bottom.

About a fortnight after her visit to the Duranes, Grania was standing one evening at the door of the

cabin looking down the track towards the sea. It had been raining heavily all day, and had now come on to blow hard. Across the nearest sound and above the cliffs of Clare the sky wore a greenish look, especially where it showed between dark roving patches of cloud. At the base of the island the cooses and small bays on the west and north-west were astir with the hissing of waves. The rising wind tore and whistled its way noisily through the sparse hawthorn-bushes and ragged growth of brambles and hemlocks. The night, clearly, was going to be a nasty one.

The girl leaned against the shelter of the doorway and looked out towards the 'Old Sea.' It was growing dark, but there was a pale splinter of white light far away, almost lost on the horizon—a sinister light, like a broken war-arrow. Everywhere else the plain was one mass of leaden-coloured waves, solid and unilluminated. The sense of a vast crowd, coming steadily onward, struggling together by fits and starts, with many side-battles and cross-currents, but on the whole bearing steadily down upon some devoted foe, pressed upon the mind as you looked out seaward.

Nearer, the prospect was not much more cheerful. The wind howled viciously, tearing off fragments of scaly stone from the rocks and flinging them against the windows and over the roof like so many forest leaves. Little Phelim Daly was in the O'Malleys' cabin. He had come, as he often did, to share their evening meal, and Grania had decided to keep him, finding the

night so wild, and had run across in the teeth of the rising gale to tell his mother so. He was not exactly an enlivening guest, and this evening seemed to be even more nerve-ridden than usual. After finishing his share of the potatoes and milk, he sat for some time hunched up, with his kness and his chin together, close to the fire. As the storm rose louder and the gust came faster and faster down the widely-gaping chimney, he grew uneasy, looked furtively round the walls, then up at the narrow slip of sky visible through the small pane of glass, shaking from head to foot as he did so, and seeming to see something out there that he dreaded, something that he was unable to resist staring at, but which scared him with the utterly unreasoning fear of an animal in presence of that which arouses all its latent hereditary terrors.

Glancing round from her post beside the doorway, Grania saw him staring thus, with parted lips and glassy eyes, agonising fear written in every lineament. Suddenly, as she watched him, a great shiver ran through his whole body, his very shadow thrown by the firelight against the opposite wall vibrating violently as a leaf vibrates in a sudden storm.

‘Why, then ! Why, then !—God look down on the child !—what ails him to-night ?’ she asked in a tone of astonishment. ‘What is it, Phelim—what do you see out there, sonny, at all, at all ?’ she added, going over and stooping down beside him upon the hearth.

For all answer the boy only shivered the harder,

clutching her at the same time, and holding her petticoat tight in his two hands, as if to hinder himself from being forcibly dragged away by someone.

‘’Tis in his bed he should be at this hour, the creature!’ Honor said from her own corner, where her pale face showed extremely like a ghost’s, framed as it was on two sides by the smoke-stained chocolate walls. ‘It is not a night for anyone to be looking about them, either in or out of the house, so it is not,’ she added, crossing herself fervently. ‘Shut the door, Grania, and put on another sod of the turf. God save us! but it is the wild weather! There is no end to the bad weather this year, so there is not. Glory be to Him that sent it, wet or fine!’

Grania obeyed, shut the door and heaped on an additional armful of turf; then stood for a while beside the fireplace, listening to the wind as it roared down the unprotected chimney.

It was indeed a night to set even sober brains afloat with nervous terrors. The little house seemed to be an atom lost in the hungry vortex of the storm and oncoming darkness. A sense of vast, uncurtained space—of tossing, interminable vastness—of an aërial ocean without bourne or limits, seemed to press upon the mind as you sat and listened. They were as lonely, those three, as though they had been the only occupants of some star or planet set in the hollow void of space. Even the yellow cat, who was rarely or never friendly, seemed to feel the influence of the weather, and came

of her own accord close up to Grania, rubbing against her as if glad to increase the sense of home and shelter by touching someone.

As Honor had said, the only thing, clearly, to do with Phelim was to put him to bed. Grania accordingly made him lie down close to the wall, upon the sort of make-shift of a bed which filled the corner where she herself slept, telling him, as she did so, to turn his head well away from the light, and to cover his ears close up with her old flannel petticoat, so as not to hear the storm. This done, she returned to her former place beside the fireplace.

CHAPTER II

SHE drew up her own particular creepy stool, and sat down, staring at the tongues of red flame as they were blown in towards her, every now and then, by a fresh gust from above.

Her thoughts and the night seemed to her to match one another. She had seen little or nothing of Murdough Blake for the last fortnight, one reason being that he had been away from Inishmaan at Ballyvaughan, in company with Shan Daly and other kindred spirits, sharing in a sort of rude regatta, got up by the hooker and curragh owners of the neighbourhood. A report had come to her through a friendly neighbour that he had been all this time drinking hard—nay, had been seen by someone lying dead drunk in the Ballyvaughan street. Whether this was the case or not, she knew that he was spending money, for the only time she had seen him had been late one evening, when he had come up to beg for a loan—not for the first or the third time either that year. She had given him the money, it being for a debt, he said, and she having a little that she could spare, and had not even reproached him,

beyond telling him that it must positively be for the last time.

Grania suffered as strong people suffer. Not patiently, nor yet with any particular inclination to complain, but with a suffering that was a sort of fire in her veins. She would have liked to have taken the matter, then and there, into her own strong hands; to have beaten Shan Daly—recognised aider and abettor in every misdeed—soundly with her own two fists; to have dragged Murdough by force out of this ditch which his own folly was slowly digging below him. Yet, what could she do? There was only one way of getting any more hold on him, and that was by marrying him. That, however, was at present impossible. Apart from Honor's increasing illness there was no place ready for them, excepting this cabin, and how could he come there? Besides, even if she did marry him, what then? could she be sure of getting any more hold over him? of stopping him from drinking? of inducing him to do anything she wished? Did he even care much about what she wished? Did he care much about her in any way, in fact, except so far as he cared for the cows and the pigs, and the other possessions she owned? Did he— Would he— Had he—?

She thrust her pampootie-shod foot suddenly into the turf, kicking it to right and left, as these thoughts crowded upon her mind, and making it flare away wildly up the chimney in a tangle of scarlet sparks.

She had forgotten Honor for the moment, or thought

perhaps that she had fallen asleep. This, however, was clearly not the case, for at that moment her soft guttural voice made itself heard from the corner.

‘What ails you then to-night, sister dear?’ she asked gently. ‘What makes you look so wild? Is it the storm that scares you?’

Grania started, then recovered herself. ‘Maybe indeed, Honor, it was the storm I was thinking of,’ she said in as indifferent a tone as she could muster. ‘It is a bitter black night and an ugly one, God knows,’ she added, looking up at the square of window, through which a faint drizzle of light still shone. There was a few minutes’ silence in the cabin, broken only by the moaning of the wind, the spitting of the fire, and the soft recurrent sound of the boy’s breathing. Suddenly a hollow, bull-voiced roar came rushing up the gully, followed by the angry thud of the sea against the rocks at the bottom of the slope. It seemed to Grania like a voice outside herself, a voice roaring confirmations of her own thoughts, and, with an impulse of disburdening herself of some at least of these, she went on:

‘Isn’t it queer, Honor, to think of all the trouble there is, far and near, over the whole, big world? Sure when one looks out over the sea and the land yonder, and beyond that again, and thinks of it all, there seems to be nothing but trouble and trouble and trouble, and more trouble upon the top of trouble. God help us! what are we brought into it for at all, at

all, I sometimes wonder, if there's to be nothing for us but trouble and trouble and trouble? 'Tis bad enough for the men, but it's worse a hundred times for the women! Where's any happiness coming to any of us from at all, at all, I want to know? I can't see much of it, look where I will, Honor, so I can't. Can you?—say, sister allanah—can you?'

Honor opened her mild brown eyes to their widest possible extent, and half raised herself up in bed in wonder at such questionings.

'Sure, child! isn't God everywhere?' she exclaimed simply. 'And happiness! Why, saints above! who ever heard of such talk! Happiness? God love the child! what were any of us, and women specially, sent into the world for, except to save our souls and learn to bear what's given us to bear? Augh, Grania, Grania! don't be looking for happiness, child, for I tell you you won't get it—not married nor single, sick nor well, rich nor poor, young nor old; for 'tisn't in it at all, at all, so how can you expect to find it? 'Tis only in heaven there's any real, right happiness, child, as I'm always telling you, and 'tis not till you get there that any one need think to find it, nor couldn't, not though they were to hunt for it the whole world over, and get under the sea-water, too, looking for it! And for a woman!—why, child, 'tis impossible! To bear and bear, that's all she's got to do, so she has, till God sends her rest—nothing else. Isn't that what she has come into the world for, no other? Oh, but 'tis the

priest himself should be telling you all that, and not me that knows so little. If you could only once get your heart to the right way of thinking, child asthore, 't isn't tormenting yourself with any such follies you'd be this night, nor any night, either! Sure, the priest would tell you that there's no happiness in this world for a man, let alone for a woman; only trouble, and trouble, as you say, on the top of trouble, and will be as long as the grass grows and the rain falls, and the streams run, and the sea goes round Ireland, and that will be till the world itself comes to an end, so it will!'

Grania for all answer thrust her foot again amongst the turf, making it flare and sputter like a Catherine wheel.

'Then I don't believe it—nor want to believe it—nor to hear it, what's more—not though every priest in Ireland or the world were to say it!' she suddenly burst out angrily. 'And it is all very well for you, Honor, a saint born, wanting nothing and caring for nothing, only just the bit to keep you alive and the spot to pray on. But all women are not made like that. My God, no! There's many and many a one would let themselves be cut in little pieces or burned alive, any day in the week, if so be they were loved back, but, if not, 't isn't better they'd get, but worse and wickeder every day, till they'd be fit to kill themselves or other people, so they would, and what good would that do to anyone? Sure, I know 'tis just nonsense talking like that to you. A nun born you are,

Honor, and always have been ; but I'm not—so there, I tell you, sister—for what's the good of me lying to you, and only us two left alone in the world and likely soon, God help me ! to be only one of us ! Sure, He knows I'd do anything to please you, Honor—you that were a mother to me, and more. But say I'd sit down easy with such a skin and a bones of a life as that, and no happiness till I come to die ?—and saints know what I'd be like then !—why, I can't, Honor, I can't, and that's the whole truth ! The priests may tell all they will of heaven, but what is it to me ?—just *gosther* ! 'Tis here I want a little bit of the happiness, so I do. Maybe 'tis very wicked, but I could not feel different, not except I was to die first and to be born right over again, so I couldn't !'

She looked over at her sister's corner as she finished speaking, half defiantly, half with a feeling of apprehension, expecting a fresh burst of reprobation in response to this outburst. Poor Honor's remonstrances, however, were exhausted. Her strength was so slight that a very little upset it, and she began to cry helplessly, uttering a soft sobbing sort of wail, more to herself than to Grania, repeating over and over again that it was all *her* fault—all *her* fault the child was lost and destroyed, and all through *her* ! What had she been doing ? what had she been doing ? Oh God ! Oh God ! what *had* she been doing ?

Grania's compunction awoke in a minute at the words. They had far more effect on her than a more

finished remonstrance would have had. Leaping up from where she was squatting beside the fire, she ran over to the bed, and, leaning over the sick woman, began trying to soothe her back into quietness, heaping abuse upon herself at the same time for having disturbed her.

‘Sorrow take me for a fool! what ailed me at all to be troubling you, and you just beginning to settle down, and enough trouble of your own to bear, God knows! and more than enough?’ she exclaimed penitently. ‘’Tis beat I should be if I got my rights this minute, and if you’d the strength to do it I’d ask you to beat me with a big stick, and welcome, Honor. Bad end to myself if I know what ailed me! ’Twas just the wild looks of that creature Phelim that put foolish thoughts in my head, that and the storm, ne’er another thing. Sure, sister dear, Honor sweet, you’ll settle to sleep again and be easy, won’t you? Don’t be punishing me by saying you won’t, or ’tis biting off my tongue another time I’ll be, rather than talking to you. Don’t all people have foolish thoughts in their heads some time or other, and you wouldn’t be troubling about any nonsense I’d say? Is it your own foolish little Grania, that always was a troublesome, ignorant little *preghaun* from the time she could run by herself?—only you so good and patient ’twas more like one of the saints out of heaven than a woman. Will I sing you the “*Moderagh rue*” then, or “*Sheela na guira*” till you’ll sleep? Weary upon this wind!

'Tis that that sets us all mad this night, I think, and puts it into my head to be talking nonsense. Hark at it battering against the door, as if it was wanting to burst it in, whether or no! There, there, Honor, you'll shut your poor eyes, and not be thinking about another thing, good or bad, till the morning. And, maybe, please God! it will be fine then, and you'll see the sun shining in at the door, and the little boats dancing up and down on the water, the way you like. Sure, 'tis in May we are now, and the bad weather can't last for ever and ever, so it can't.'

Honor shut her eyes, more to please Grania and satisfy her entreaties, than because she felt any inclination to sleep. Little by little, however, exhaustion crept over her, and she fell into a doze, which passed by degrees into broken, uneasy slumbers. Even in her sleep, however, it was clear that the same thoughts pursued her, for from time to time she would sigh heavily, her lips uttering now a broken prayer, now some tender self-accusing word, while in her eyes, had there been light to see them, the large tears might have been seen gathering slowly, and stealing one after the other down the hollows of her poor thin cheeks.

Finding that she really was sleeping, Grania presently left her bedside, and sat down again beside the now all but invisible fire, her thoughts wandering first to one thing then to another as she listened to the wind. Once, too, she got up and went over to the door to make sure that there was no danger of its being

burst in by the blasts that kept rushing one after the other against it like battering-rams through the narrow funnel. Then, having carefully covered up the *greeshaugh*, or hot embers, so as to be able to light the fire in the morning, she, too, lay down beside little Phelim, pushing him gently over a little nearer to the wall in order to find room for herself upon the same well-worn narrow pallet.

CHAPTER III

ABOUT the still more exposed cabin of the Duranes the storm raged yet more furiously, and awoke, one after the other, all its inhabitants, no less than nine of whom were sleeping under its roof that night. It blew the white turf-ashes out from the chimney in such a shower over Pete himself, who was sleeping upon the right-hand side of the fireplace, and whose mouth happened to be wide open at the time, that it became filled with them, in getting rid of which he uttered a succession of sputtering sounds which had the undesirable effect of arousing his wife and exciting her never very distant wrath.

‘*Monnum a Dhea!* is it waking the children you want to be after *now*?’ she asked in a tone all the more acrid from its enforced lowness. Then, with a ‘Whist! whist! whist!’ addressed to the baby, she began, gently but rapidly, thumping that important personage’s back, so as to hinder it, if possible, from awaking.

Unfortunately the action brought her elbow into sudden sharp contact with the head of the youngest little girl, who had nestled close up to her for warmth,

and who immediately responded with a loud howl, which in its turn aroused Juggy Kelly, Pete's niece and the general servant of the establishment, who slept with the chickens in a sort of loft overhead, and who, with a vague idea that something was suddenly being required of her, began, half awake, to hist and hoost vigorously, as if she were driving in geese or turkeys to roost.

‘Auch! listen to that creature!’ muttered the mistress of the house in a tone of yet more acrid displeasure—a displeasure only kept low by the fear of awakening the rest of the still slumbering flock. ‘*Bedhe husth! Bedhe husth!*’ she called up in a shrill whisper in the direction of the offender. ‘Troth, and I might speak to the chickens themselves and better,’ she added to herself in a mutter of indignation. ‘A fool that Juggy came into the world, and a fool she’ll stop in it as long as the head stays on her! What ails me to be letting myself be troubled with her, I wonder? Isn’t *one* fool enough for a decent woman to have on her hands at the same time?—yes, indeed, and more than enough! ’Tis the right *baulyore* I am with my easy-going ways, slaving and slaving from morning till night, and getting no thanks, only feeding them that never yet did a day’s work—nor couldn’t either, I believe, though you covered them with gold from head to foot, and promised them all Ireland in return for doing it. Whist! whist! whist, I tell you! *Will* you whist, I say?’ she continued to the baby, who had by this

time joined its plaintive howls to the other confusion of noises within and without the cabin. 'Whist this very minute! Arrah, will you hold the tongue of you then, and stop bawling? What! and will nothing else content ye? There, then, there, then; *now* be easy, and let me hear no more of you.' Then, as the baby's voice sank into a chuckle and murmur of content, 'Weary on you, one and all, for torments! my life's destroyed amongst you, late and early! Never a day's peace or quiet upon this earth, God knows!'

'Dada, my foot's sore! There's a big thorn sticking out of the top of it!' suddenly exclaimed the youngest child but two, a small, red-headed, lively creature called Norah, its father's chief favourite, who was sleeping in an obscure corner of the cabin along with a brother of about a year older.

'Arrah, hush, my dotey! Be easy, now, there's a good child, and don't be crossing your mother!' Pete answered apprehensively, creeping out of his own bed and feeling his way over in the darkness to where the child's voice came from. 'There, there; go to sleep quick, acushla agus, and sure dada will look for the ugly devil of a thorn in the morning and pull it out, never fear,' he whispered soothingly, whereupon the child, satisfied by his assurance, put up her little face to be kissed and then settled down again, curling her little legs under her as a small drowsy bird curls itself into its own corner of the nest.

'Man Above! it is the terrible night it is, and no

mistake!’ Pete added to himself in a tone of apprehension, looking round him with a terrified glance as a wilder gust than ever swept down the chimney, rattling the ill-fitting woodwork, once more filling the cabin with white ashes, and threatening to bring the whole crazy construction about their ears.

‘Wild weather! God save all mariners upon the sea, far and near, this night, amen!’ muttered old Durane from his own corner behind the door, the one most out of the draught, and partially protected also by the *corrag*, or screen of dry branches of furze and alder. He was only half awake, but the formula was so familiar that it rose unbidden to his lips even in his sleep.

‘True to you, father, the same, amen!’ dutifully responded his son, as he skipped back across the cabin and into his own lair, pulling the great-coat which was his chief covering by night as well as by day close up to his chin.

‘Yerra! you’re the nice pair, the two of you, talking and carrying on in the black heart of the night as if it was the broad middle of the day!’ his wife exclaimed angrily. ‘And I that have not had one taste of sleep yet, and my two arms broke with holding up the child! I take the holy Mother of God to witness that ’tis enough to make any woman curse the hour she was born, let alone the day she ever laid her two eyes upon such a man—not to say he is a man at all, for he isn’t, nor hasn’t the spirit nor the courage nor the sense of a man, only clever at putting upon one that’s too

soft and easy ever to say a "no" to him! Yerra! give him his bit and his sup and his bed, and his easy life, and 'tis all he wants. *Wurrah deelish! Wurrah deelish!* 'tis the queer husband *I* have, anyhow! God, He knows that, so He does!

To all this, Pete the submissive made no reply, only rolled himself up into a ball, trying to get his feet out of the piercing draught, a performance which, despite the shortness of his legs, he utterly failed to accomplish. By degrees the scolding voice died away for mere lack of anything to feed upon; the baby, too, slept; little red-headed Norah crept closer and closer to her brother, pushing him against another sister who lay just beyond, till the three became an indistinguishable mass of small mottled arms and legs. The old man had relapsed into the placid dreamless slumbers of old age. Up in the chicken-loft poor, much-abused Juggy Kelly lay, her troubles and stupidities alike forgotten, one fat arm, utterly bare of covering, hanging outside the thin coverlet, her mouth wide open, and deep snores heaving her capacious chest.

Thus, despite the blasts which unceasingly shook it, all the inmates of the cabin little by little fell asleep. In other cabins scattered over the face of the island the inhabitants, too, slept, notwithstanding the storm, till, towards daybreak, the wind itself—sweeping over and over, and round and round its unprotected top; playing mad pranks along the steep perpendicular cliffs; rushing vociferously through the narrow fluted channels and

fissures, in at one end, out at the other ; loosening the thin flakes of limestone and dropping them with a hollow or tinkling clatter upon the next ledge—producing, in short, every variety of sound of which that not very responsive musical instrument was capable—was the only thing left awake and astir upon Inishmaan.

CHAPTER IV

THE art of weaving is one that has been practised upon the Aran isles for a longer time than it is easy to reckon. It cannot, however, be said to have, so far, reached any very high point of perfection. At the time at which this story opened there were no fewer than four professional weavers upon Inishmaan. Dumb Denny O'Shaughnessy, however, had always been considered to stand at the top of his profession, especially as the maker of the thick yellowish-white flannel used by the women for their bodices and by the men for their entire suits. Dumb Denny had now been dead some months, but the weaving trade was still carried on by his nephew Teige, though there were not wanting captious housewives ready to cry out that the stuff produced by him was of a very inferior quality to that produced by old Denny. Changes, no matter of what sort or from what cause, are naturally condemned in such places as Inishmaan.

Grania had for some time back been intending to get Honor the materials for a new bed-gown, the only garment the poor woman now ever needed. Honor

herself had deprecated the expense, declaring that the old one did well enough, though her elbows had long been through the sleeves—a fact not to be concealed whenever her old striped shawl, the only other garment she wore, fell back and left them exposed. Patches might perhaps have been fitted to them, but unfortunately Grania's various accomplishments did not include any very intimate acquaintance with a needle, her hands being much more at home with an oar or a pitchfork. Honor, for an Aranite, had been a fairly neat worker in her day, but that day was long past. In any case, new flannel Grania was determined to get, and when she had set her mind resolutely upon anything it was not likely to be long delayed.

A few days later, therefore, she set off for the O'Shaughnessy cabin to give the order to Teige, first driving 'Moonyeen' down to enjoy an hour's illicit feeding upon the bent-grass on the seashore. This small act of habitual larceny accomplished, she followed the level platform of rock till she reached the corner of the island, which brought her opposite to the little spit or isthmus by means of which the islet upon which the O'Shaughnessys' cabin stood joined on to its larger neighbour.

The weather was as bad as ever. Though it was now mid-May the day felt like March. An ill-conditioned blast—easterly rather than westerly—seemed to be waiting for the passer-by at every corner. As she walked along the prospect was enough to set even

native teeth on edge. In every direction spread the eternal grey sheets of rock, broken into fissures, battered by the storms, half melted under dissolving torrents of rain, their few patches of greenery shrunk away into the fissures for warmth and safety. Beyond lay the unvarying sweep of grey sea, or of land almost as cheerless. Overhead the same eternal cloud-processions. No clear sky anywhere. On they went, those clouds; hurrying endlessly; grey, shapeless masses entangled in one another; clutching at one another with bodiless fingers, rolling away into the distance for ever and ever; always going on, and yet never gone.

Especially was the wind cold and boisterous upon the narrow tongue of rock that linked the O'Shaughnessys' territory to the rest of the world. It seemed to be literally sweeping in from all sides at once as Grania made her way across, avoiding as far as possible the oily coils of seaweed strewn over it, and, having reached the other side, clambered up the short steep bit of cliff which intervened between it and the cabin.

The door stood wide open, so that before she reached it she could see right through the cabin and out to the sea upon the other side. There were two windows, one on the same side as the door, looking south towards Inishmaan, the other looking northward. It was through this one that the grey light of the sea lying below came so distinctly, shining upon the floor and walls with something of the cold sheen and glitter of a sea-cave. Between the two windows stretched the loom, a rickety

structure of indistinguishable hue, its beams half rotten, and bent and warped with time, the very cords on which the work in progress was stretched being so worn and old that it seemed impossible they could continue to serve their purpose much longer. In place, too, of a metal sustainer a small bar of wood held up the work in progress—in the present case a piece of the usual whitish flannel of the island, the same that Grania had herself come to order.

Teige O'Shaughnessy was sitting bent double over his work, but he suddenly lifted his head, and started erect with a look of sheepish joy when he saw his visitor.

Poor Teige! He was not much less ill-favoured now than he had been six years earlier. On the contrary, a fall which he had had while puffin-hunting had resulted in a lameness which, though it did not hinder him from walking, made it painful to him. As Teige the *boccach*, or cripple, he was known all over the islands, where his freckled face, red hair, and halting gait was a familiar object in every cabin, as he came and went with his bundles of flannel and coarse homespun friezes.

Standing behind his loom, whose beams and pulleys filled nearly the whole interior of the cabin, his poor, ugly face looked up at his visitor from under its red thatch with a peculiarly wistful expression, an expression not often seen on a man's face, very often upon that of some affectionate and rather unusually ill-used dog. Yet Grania had never ill-used Teige O'Shaughnessy. At least, had she? The question is not so easily

answered as may at first sight seem. Given a woman with a larger share of plain human affection than she can conveniently dispose of—an impatient woman, hot-tempered and vehement—let her have given away that affection where it is, to say the least, indifferently responded to; let her have someone else at hand to whom she is as the sun, moon, and stars shining in their glory—as wonderful and hardly less unapproachable—what sort of treatment is she likely to mete out to that person? The experience of larger places than Inishmaan may be taken to supply the answer!

Grania's own impression, had she been asked, was that she was very good indeed to Teige O'Shaughnessy—now. She allowed him, that is to say, to do a multitude of odd jobs for her that she would never for an instant have dreamt of troubling Murdough with. When Honor had been well enough, for instance, it had been his office to help row the two sisters over to Aranmore to mass upon a Sunday morning, one for which he was well fitted, as he was as expert in the management of a curragh as she was herself, though his lameness made him less serviceable in other tasks, such as digging, or carrying heavy loads uphill.

A patient, hard-working, poor *boccach*, that everyone admitted him to be—admitted it with the contempt which such grovelling qualities naturally awaken in Ireland. Indoors, especially, his handiness was really degrading. The earthen floor of the cabin was actually reported to be swept by him, not once a month, but

every morning before he settled down to his day's work. The two tiny-paned windows were both extraordinarily clean, and the glass literally whole, so that the cabin was an exceptionally light one, in spite of its space being almost wholly blocked up by the loom and its various appurtenances.

To anyone entering at that moment, a first glance would have revealed no figure but that of the weaver himself. As Grania advanced into the cabin, however, an odd-looking, little, doubled-up, red object rose from a corner of the hearth where it had been squatting, and came towards her, making queer bobs, ducks, and uncanny grimaces as it did so.

This was deaf and dumb Biddy O'Shaughnessy, twin-sister to the man lately dead. Biddy had always been reckoned 'queer' upon Inishmaan, and her infirmity had naturally tended to cut her off from her fellows. She was also said to be malicious, though how a creature so helpless could be supposed to have the means of injuring anyone, it was hard to say. Whatever affection she had to give had certainly all been concentrated upon her twin-brother, and, since his death, she had grown more elf-like and uncanny than ever, as if the one tie that linked her to humanity had now been broken. She was asserted by her neighbours to detest her nephew Teige, though for this assertion also there was probably only the wildest surmise to go upon, and certainly Teige had never shown any signs of being aware of the fact himself.

Upon Grania the old woman's presence had always produced a distinctly unpleasant impression—not exactly of fear, not exactly of repulsion, but of something not very far removed from both. She had never got over that all but insane access of terror which the sight of the two old twins had inspired in her on the evening when, as the reader will remember, she had peeped in as a child at the cabin-window, and then torn madly home in consternation to Honor. Biddy was known, too, to have the power of seeing the 'gentry,' namely, the *shee* or *sidh*—beings who creep out from every mouse-hole and from behind every rafter the minute a family has gone to sleep, but which few people have the power of seeing and actually holding communication with. Of these privileged few, Biddy O'Shaughnessy was universally held to be one.

After uttering sundry queer clacking noises, something like the notes of a bald coot, which were intended to serve as greetings, the old woman seemed to forget her visitor, going back to her former place and squatting down again beside the fire. Meanwhile Grania proceeded to explain to Teige the sort of flannel she wanted to have for Honor, handing him at the same time a mass of wool which had been spun by themselves several winters before. The piece of flannel then upon the loom being of the same character, though coarser than the one she wanted, she took hold of it to show Teige how she wished it to be different, explaining that she wanted Honor to have the warmest and softest

flannel possible. Poor Honor! she was so thin that everything fretted her skin and hurt her nowadays.

While they stood there talking the cold light reflected off the sea shone upon their two heads bent over the loom, Grania's dark one, from which her shawl had dropped, and Teige's carrotty poll, the fiery redness of which was only modified by the dust that had gathered thickly on it in the course of his day's work. The tide rose higher and higher, wetting the rocks and stranded, half-dry seaweeds, curling round the small indentations, and shooting noisily upwards in long jets of spray. It seemed as if the little house on top must presently be overtaken and washed away by it. They had to raise their voices almost to a shout so as to hear one another above the tumult.

Old Biddy, vexed perhaps at being left out of the conference, presently began to move about, uttering the queer, disjointed grunts and croaks which were her chief contributions to conversation. First she chattered vehemently to herself; next, apparently, to someone or something sitting amongst the smouldering embers of the turf; next she began to stare at the rafters overhead, nodding and blinking at them, as if some friendly or inquisitive face was peering down from between their interstices. After a while, growing tired of these entertainments, she crept over towards the loom, making her way in and out of its crazy woodwork with a deftness born of long practice. In this way she got by degrees to the other side, unobserved by the two

absorbed over the discussion of the flannel. For a while she contented herself with gazing up at them, her wrinkled old monkey-face puckered into a variety of quaint grimaces—a wonderful old human gargoyle, beyond the imagination of even a Gothic carver adequately to reproduce. All at once a new notion seemed to seize her, and the next time the two heads approached one another, bending over the woof, Teige explaining something and Grania listening, she darted forward, and, with a sudden, impish clutch, caught at them and held them tightly together, so that for a few seconds the two faces were forcibly pushed cheek to cheek, the total unexpectedness of the movement hindering either of them from resisting.

Grania was the first to pull herself away, and she did it furiously. The very touch of the old creature was like the touch of a toad or a spider to her—it sent a shiver of disgust through her whole body. She turned angrily, her arm was up, she was about to strike. She stopped short, however, at sight of the crooked, diminutive body and grinning monkey-face before her. Old Biddy, on her side, bobbed, ducked, and chattered, blinking her eyes, a little frightened evidently, yet proud, too, and pleased by her own successful piece of mischief. Grania, thereupon, swept round upon Teige. *Someone* should be responsible—*someone* should be made to pay for the insult! Teige was standing in the same place beside the loom, his face red as a lobster, as red as his hair, but his eyes shining—shining as they had

probably never shone in his life before. The poor, ill-favoured *boccach* was for the moment transfigured. Grania stared at him in sheer astonishment. What did he mean? What was he staring at? What on earth possessed him? She felt confused and startled. Something was passing through her, a sudden impression, she did not as yet know what it was, but it was something new—something at once new and disturbing—something that meant—— What, she asked herself confusedly, *did* it mean?

With a sudden, angry clutch she swept up her shawl which was lying on the floor, and, without another word, ran out of the cabin down the steep bit of pathway which led to the narrow causeway, now narrower than ever from the fast encroaching tide.

Lame as he was, Teige, being nearer to the door, contrived to scramble after her, and caught her up just as she reached the other side.

‘Auch, Grania! Grania O’Malley!—’tisn’t angry you’d be with one who hasn’t the sense of life in her at all, at all?’ he cried deprecatingly—‘a creature that can’t speak with her tongue, nor hear with her ears, nor understand, nor a thing! What is she but a poor old lost one out and out, old Biddy, God help her! Sure, Grania O’Malley, ’tisn’t yourself would turn upon such a one as that? Arrah, I know you wouldn’t.’

But Grania was not to be reasoned with. She pulled her hand furiously away, almost pushing him down the rocks in her anger. What did he mean by

trying to stop her? what did he mean by staring at her? what did he mean by——? Had they all gone mad to-day—herself into the bargain? Why did he look at her like that?—look at her as no one else had ever—why did he—why did she——? Her head spun round; she hurried on.

It was like an idea dropped out of another world, a world remote from Inishmaan and Aran altogether. It set her whole frame in a whirl, not as regards Teige—he was a chip, a straw, nothing—but because it chimed in with something—a tune, a notion—she could not tell what, which had often sung through her brain and tingled in her ears, been heard now and then for a moment, sometimes almost distinctly, then lost, then heard again. What was it? What was the name of that tune? Was it inside herself or outside, or where was it?

Scrambling over the rocks, she hurried on, forgetting in her excitement to fetch home 'Moonyeen,' forgetting the flannel, forgetting everything but this new voice, buzzing, buzzing unceasingly in her ears. Presently she found that she had overshot the path by a considerable distance, so stopped a minute, perplexed and giddy, close to the edge of the cliff. Below her lay the coose where Murdough kept his curragh, and beyond it she could see the little old villa, standing upon its narrow green platform, backed up behind and at the side with rocks. On a nearer view it would have been seen to have grown even more tumbledown than when

we saw it last ; its rusty ironwork still more rusty, and still more fantastic in its decrepitude. At this distance, however, it was practically unchanged, and, ruined as it was, it shed an air of classic dignity, of half-effaced importance and prosperity upon the spot where it stood, such as no other spot on Inishmaan certainly boasted.

Grania stood for a moment on the edge of the cliff, staring down at it ; her black brows almost meeting in the intensity of her gaze, her arms locked one over the other on her chest, her face working. Suddenly she turned with a gesture of impatience, and looked away from it towards the other side, the side where there was no villa, and where there was nothing to be seen, nothing, that is, but the sea and the bare sea-washed sheets of limestone. Ledge above ledge, layer above layer, these last rose ; straight, horizontal, clean cut as if laid by some builder's hands, a mass of crude, uncompromising masonry. Under that heavy, lowering sky it was about as cold and as menacing a prospect as could well be imagined—a prospect, too, that had a suggestion somehow about it of cruelty. ‘Look well at me,’ it seemed to say, ‘you have only to choose. Life up there on those stones ! death down here upon these—there, you see, where the surf is licking the mussels ! Choose—choose carefully—take your time—only choose !’

No one was in sight, not even a cow, only a few seagulls overhead, and with a quick impulse, born of her own hurrying thoughts, the girl suddenly flung up her

arms, uttering at the same time a low cry, half of anger, half of sheer brain-tormenting perplexity. It was like the cry of some dumb creature, vague, inarticulate, full of uncomprehended pain, and of still less comprehended dissatisfaction. She could not have explained why she did it, what she meant by it, or what was amiss. Nothing had happened. She was in no trouble, everything was the same as usual ; only—only——

It relieved, yet it startled her. She looked round, fearing to have been overheard. A tuft of nodding yellow tansy looked up with an air of impudent intelligence into her face. Whatever its thoughts may have been, however, it kept them to itself, and merely nodded the harder.

With another shamefaced glance around, Grania turned and made her way, this time straight home to the cabin where Honor was waiting for her, and where she had to listen to a long, tender remonstrance upon the folly of wasting money upon clothes for the likes of her. What was the good of it at all, at all ? Was it for the burying she wanted them ? Didn't everyone know it was a sin and a shame to be buying clothes for people that could never live to wear them out ? Wickedness, so it was, God knew !—no better. Grania listened to all this silently, then equally silently went about her work. All day she experienced a startled sort of feeling. Something seemed to have happened. And yet no—upon second thoughts she remembered nothing had happened. It was as if something had got

inside herself, or into the air—she could not tell where. That tune; what was it? who had sung it to her? what was its name? what did it all mean? By degrees, however, the impression began to pass away, till by bed-time it had almost gone.

As for Teige O'Shaughnessy he remained at least ten minutes standing upon the same spot where they had parted, gazing with the same air of sheepish remonstrance at the piece of rock where he had seen her last. Then, with a grunt and a look of perplexity, he returned, scratching his carroty head, to the cabin, and set to work again upon the piece of flannel stretched upon the loom. The tide continued to rise; the little peninsula was presently converted into an island; he and old Biddy were as effectually cut off from the rest of Inishmaan as though an ocean had rolled between them and it. She was back now in her usual place beside the chimney, her eyes fixed with a look of eager, unblinking fascination upon a particular spot amongst the rafters. All at once she sprang up, made a dart forward, and caught at something, small enough, apparently, to be contained in one hand, then retreated, gibbering and chuckling, to her stool again, as delighted evidently as a child that has captured a butterfly. Cautiously she opened finger after finger, at last the whole hand; peeped round each portion of it separately, examined front, back, and sides, every part of it, her wrinkled old face twisted into an expression first of high glee, next of incredulity. Finally, with a grimace

of sudden disappointment and malice, she turned, shaking her fist and chattering her teeth furiously, in the direction of her nephew, evidently regarding him as in some way or other responsible for the disappointment.

CHAPTER V

AT last the spell which had so long brooded over the islands was broken! The weather changed. The rain ceased—temporarily at any rate. A glimmer of sunshine even broke out, and sent dimpling, pinkish reflections one after the other along the sides of the little cooses, which for months had known no colours but indian ink and lamp-black. The rock pools themselves awoke, the oozy things that tenant them seeming to feel the warm impulsion from above, expanding their snaky tentacles and turning their ever-gaping, hungry, jelly-like mouths towards the sunlight.

Down at the old church of Cill-Cananach the spring had asserted itself yet more undeniably. The rocks there were so worn and thinned away as hardly to be visible at all, and over them the sands had spread in a succession of humps and hollows. These humps and hollows were full of shells—sea shells and land shells, tossed together in friendly companionship. You might have picked out of them a winkle or a limpet, and the next minute the yellow-banded cast-off house of a common snail. Bare it was, always must be bare; nevertheless,

there was a suggestion of something warmer, of something less austere and grim than those wind-infested shores often gave. Tufts of maiden-hair hung confidently over the ledges, the rare yellow rock-rose, which, by some odd caprice, finds its home here and here only, showed at intervals its brilliant brown-spotted face, while everywhere the thyme, spread about in great purple masses, gave out its sweet wild smell.

Grania O'Malley, more than most others, rejoiced in this sudden escape from winter into something like a realisation of summer. She had been living for some time back in a sort of tomb—an open-air one, but still a tomb. Now a change had come, and the youth in her rose to it. Murdough Blake, too, grew suddenly more companionable. He actually came of his own accord, and proposed to aid her in some of her accustomed tasks, and they accordingly resumed their nightly occupation of feeding the kelp fire—she, that is to say, feeding it, he feeding her ears and his own upon the usual gorgeous, if windy, diet of achievements to be performed by himself at some remote, as yet undiscovered, date.

One afternoon she started about four o'clock towards an old 'clochaun,' or bee-hive cell, the only variation of architecture Inishmaan boasts, setting aside raths, cabins, ruined churches, and the solitary Italianised villa upon the east shore. She had hoped Murdough might have met her there, he having promised to do so. There was no sign of him, however, so she set to work without loss of time, having brought a sickle for the

purpose, and was soon piling a heap of grass upon the flattest of the neighbouring slabs.

This 'clochaun'—last of a once, doubtless, numerous kindred—was still reasonably intact, though its windows were all but closed, partly from the slipping of the stones above them, partly from the great bosses of lichen and strong-growing sea-thrift which choked their openings. With its roof of overlapping stones, rounded walls, and floor of earth mixed with sand and shells, it had far more the aspect of some queerly constructed bird's-nest, some erratically disposed beast's lair, than anything conceivable as having ever been inhabited by the human biped. At this date, too, it was even less like a human abode than when some skin-clad sixth-century monk inhabited it, for from floor below to roof above it was covered with a dense growth of tall, feathery-looking grass, which sprouted in tufts on either side, and waved in a dense triumphal crop over the small domed summit.

Lying, as it did, within the track over which the O'Malley sisters reigned, they naturally had the right of grazing there, and it was this that had brought Grania out that afternoon, sickle in hand, to clear the walls of their harvest, and carry it home to the calf, whose appetite was a sort of raging lion, never to be appeased, and who regarded a diet largely made up of maiden-hair ferns, red-crane's-foot, champions, white saxifrages, and such-like flowery provender with natural, if unæsthetic, contempt.

She waited a while after clearing the 'clochaun' of its grass to give Murdough a chance of appearing. Then, as there were no signs of him, and the afternoon was still early, it occurred to her, before saddling herself with her load, that she would go down to the villa, which was no great distance, and see if he was there—a contingency which, from her acquaintanceship with his habits, she had reason to regard as far from improbable.

She did not find him, but there were signs of his having been there not long before, and of his having had company, too—company that, in her opinion, he would have been much better without. A still picturesque, if dilapidated, villa without, it had gradually grown into the likeness of a mere dirty, disreputable little 'shebeen-shop' inside. The floor was filthy with accumulated mud, brought in on many pairs of pampooties and never cleared away. Some cracked glasses, a couple of black bottles with jagged, dangerous-looking necks, and several old tin pannikins stood heaped together upon a sort of ledge which served as a table. There was a barrel, too, half hidden behind some cut furze-bushes in a remote corner. The existence of this barrel was supposed to be a profound secret, but secrets are ill kept in places like Inishmaan, and Grania, like everyone else, knew perfectly well that a barrel of illicit whisky had been put ashore there some three weeks before. How much of that whisky was there left now? she wondered.

She had made her way in by a back window, the secret of opening which Murdough had long ago shown

her, and now looked round her with a sensation of intense disgust. Like most Irishwomen of her class—at all events till age, sympathy, possibly till mere abounding patience and pity break them in—this was to her the sin of sins ; the sin that meant starvation, clamorous children, misery of all sorts, shame and the horrors of the workhouse at no very remote future. To-day, too, she was already vexed and disappointed, and therefore less inclined than usual to be tolerant.

‘It is the fool he is ! My God ! it is the fool !’ she muttered fiercely, as she looked about her. ‘What ails him, then, at all, at all ?—soaking ! soaking ! soaking ! What ails them all, my God ? Weary upon that drink, but it is the curse of the world !’

She went over to the barrel and shook it viciously, not having anything else at hand to shake. It was nearly empty, for she could hear what little liquor was left splashing about at the very bottom. Had it been full, she would, perhaps, in her wrath, have dragged it out, stove in the bottom and let the stuff run away into the sea. As it was, it did not seem worth while. She came out again, a scowl upon her face, an angry red light shining in her eyes ; dropped the window into its place ; climbed the hill with swift, wrathful steps, and returned to the ‘clochaun’ and her heap of grass. Here, having collected together the latter with a sort of fierce energy, she made it into an enormous stack, got the rope round it, and, having hoisted it up by main force upon her back, turned to go homeward.

As she was slowly mounting from the third to the fourth ledge she saw a figure sitting alone upon a large boulder close to the edge of the track, and perceived, upon coming nearer, that it was old Durane, who was sunning himself in the unaccustomed warmth, enjoying a pipe and the luxury of being free from even the distant sounds of his daughter-in-law's tongue.

Everyone upon Inishmaan regarded it as a high privilege to get old Durane to talk, for he was a stately and reticent old personage, as has been seen, quite satisfied with being excellent company to himself, and not tormented, as most of us are, by any burning desire of being recognised as good company by others as well. Where he was sitting was within the edge of the O'Malleys' territory, and as Grania with her towering load came up the track he looked up and, perhaps, in recognition of that fact, gave her a civil good-day, with a wave of his hand, and a *Banaght lath! Banaght lath!*—an old-fashioned mode of salutation, already almost completely gone out of fashion.

A sudden impulse came over the girl—an unusual one with her, for she was not gregarious—an impulse to stop a minute and have a chat with the old fellow, the rather that the cord was cutting her shoulder badly, and a rest, therefore, would not be unwelcome.

‘It is down at the old house by the sea—the gentlefolks’ house as they call it—I have been, Mr. Durane, sir,’ she observed in a tone of suitable respect, as she sat down beside him on the great smooth top of the

boulder. 'And it is a bad way it is getting into, too—a very bad way, so it is.' Then, after a minute—'Was it ever as it was in the old time, when the quality was living upon Inishmaan, that you remember it?' she went on in rather a hesitating tone, her first conversational venture not having, so far, met with any particular encouragement on the part of her neighbour.

Old Durane shifted his pipe from one side of his mouth to the other, looked seaward, spat politely behind him into a fissure, then turned a bright little puckered eye upon her as if to ask her what she was driving at, and presently took up his parable.

'Is it about Mr. Lynch Bodkin you are asking me, my good girl, if I remember him? Oh, but yes, I do remember him very well; why not? why not? He was a great man, and a good man, Mr. Lynch Bodkin—a *very* good man! He would have ten, yes, and twelve gentlemen over from Galway or Round'stown at one time to dine with him, and it is the door of the house he would lock if they wanted to go away early, so he would. "No man has ever left my table till I choose, and no man ever shall," he would say. "Is it to shame me you would be after, and in my own house, too? There is the red wine, and there is the white wine for you, and, if that will not do, there is the whisky wine too, and you may take your choice, gentlemen!" that is what he would say. Oh! a very good man he was, Mr. Lynch Bodkin, very. There are no such gentlemen left now—no, none at all.'

Grania listened with profound attention. It all seemed rather odd somehow. In what, she wondered, did Mr. Lynch Bodkin's particular goodness consist?

'And was it always drunk the gentleman would be, and the other gentlemen that were with him, too?' she inquired in a tone of perfect gravity.

'Drunk? but he was not drunk at all!—never to say drunk!' old Durane answered indignantly. 'And for respect, I would have you to know, my good girl, that there was not a gentleman in all Galway—no, nor in Mayo either, nor in the whole of Connaught—that was so much thought of as Mr. Lynch Bodkin! It was down there by the sea yonder he would hold his courts, so he would, for it was he that gave all the justice to Inishmaan—yes, and to the other islands as well. And it would have to be upon a fine day, because it would be on the outside of his house that he would hold the court always—yes, indeed, outside of it, down there on the rocks by the sea that it would be held. And if it was not a very fine day, he would just go out of the door and look up at the sky, and say to the people, "Come again to-morrow, boys!" and they would all go away. Then next day, perhaps, they would come. Oh! but it was a fine sight, I can tell you, to see his honour sitting there in a great gold arm-chair that would be brought out of the house, out from his own parlour, and put upon the rocks yonder! There would be, perhaps, six or seven people brought up for him to judge at once, and sometimes his honour would put the handcuffs on

them himself, so he would, for it was in his own house he kept the handcuffs always. And if it was anything very bad, oh! very bad indeed they had done, then it was to the "Continent" over beyond there he would send them—into Galway to the jail—because there has never been any jail on Aran.'

'And would they go into the jail when he sent them?' Grania inquired with some surprise.

'Is it go? Indeed and it is they that *must* go. My God! yes, and find the boat to go in, too, so they must, and pay for that boat themselves, so they must! It was just a small bit of writing his honour would be good enough to give them, that was all, and they must show it at the jail-door in Galway when they went in. Go? I do not think there was a man or a woman on Inishmaan, no, nor on all Aran, nor anywhere near it, that would not have gone to jail, or anywhere else, if his honour, Mr. Lynch Bodkin, had sent him! A great man, and a very good man too, Mr. Lynch Bodkin! There are no such quality now.'

Old Durane paused, lost apparently in pleasurable retrospection.

'But it is back I must be getting,' he added presently, rising with sudden briskness from his seat. 'And you, too, my fine girl, with your bundle of grass on your back! Gorra! but it is some young man that should be carrying it for you, and if I was twenty years younger I would not see you so loaded—so I would not. And how is that good woman your sister? No better?

Tchah ! tchah ! that is bad ! It is not long you will be keeping her with you, I am afraid ! Well, well, it is in God's hands, and it is the best sort He will have for Himself, and small blame to Him for that, either—no, indeed ; small blame to Him ! You will tell her that I was asking after her, for it is the sick people that like to hear and know everything that goes on. When my wife was such a long time dying, it was not a cat kitted in all Inishmaan but she must know about it the first—yes, indeed, always—always the very first ! But I will wish you a good-day now, my fine girl ; I will wish you a very good-day.' And old Durane, who soon tired of any company, except his own, toddled away with a wave of his ragged caubeen that would have done honour to an ambassador.

Grania, too, shouldered her load again after a minute and went ploddingly on her way home. She felt less angry, somehow, since she had talked to this old philosopher, though she could not have explained why. It seemed as if some voice of the past had got between her and her wrath. Would it have been any different in those old times she wondered, or was it always the same ? Always ? always ?

She was no sooner out of sight and round the corner of the next rock than old Durane sat down again, stretching his long thin legs luxuriously before him, so as to let the warm light which played over the top of the ridge reach them. He was not really in any hurry to get home. Rosha and her shrill rasping

voice were joys that would keep. He loved the sunshine beyond everything, though he got it so seldom, and on fine days, deserting the cabin, deserting even his favourite stony arm-chair, would seek out some sheltered cleft of the rocks or hollow amongst the furze, and sit there hour after hour, turning the pebbles in front of him about with his stick, and smiling slowly to himself, sometimes muttering over and over some cabalistic word—a word which, for the moment, had the effect of re-creating for him the past, one which, even to himself, had grown almost spectrally remote, so dim and far away was it. A queer old ragged Ulysses this, whose Ithaca was that solitary islet set in the bleak and inhospitable Atlantic! Far out of sight, and rarely now to be stirred by anything modern, lay hidden away in the recesses of that old brain of his a whole phantasmagoria of recollections, beliefs, prejudices, traditions; bits of a bygone feudal world, with all its habits and customs; bits of a hardly more remote and forgotten legendary world; the world of the primitive Celt—a big, elemental world this, glorious with the light of a still unspoiled future—fragments of fifty creeds, fragments of a hundred modes of thought, all dead enough, Heaven knows, yet alive for the moment under that weather-beaten old caubeen of his. This peculiarly Irish form of brain-endowment has never yet found expression in art—never, so far as can be judged by symptoms, is in the

least likely to do so—but it has from time immemorial served as the source of a good deal of odd discounted entertainment to its possessors, and that, if not the same thing, is perhaps as good a one—possibly even better.

CHAPTER VI

GREGORY SOUND, Foul Sound, South Sound, every sound around the three islands was full of mackerel.

For several days all the available currachs belonging to Inishmaan, and the two other islands as well, had been out after them the whole day long. The Aran folk are not particularly expert fishermen, and their share of the herring fishery, the chief take of the year, is apt to be a meagre one. They have neither the tackle nor the hereditary skill of the Galway Claddagh men—though even these fish less and worse than their fathers did, and let the lion's share of the yearly spoil fall into the hands of strangers. As for the once famous 'sun-fishing,' it has become a myth: the fish are scarcer, but even when they do appear hardly an attempt is made to secure them.

Grania O'Malley and Murdough Blake were out alone together in a curragh in the South Sound. They were fishing at a distance of several miles from their own island, beyond the least of the three islands, Inisheer, and between it and the opposite coast of Clare. The sun shone brightly, the sea was almost a

dead calm, yet the great green rollers kept their boat incessantly on the move—slowly, slowly up one side of a smooth green glassy ridge ; then slowly, slowly down the other side—down, down, down, sleepily, quietly, all but imperceptibly, into the hollow of the next glassy valley ; then up, up, up, to the very top of the one beyond.

Despite this movement the sea had the effect of seeming to have a film of glass laid over it, so unbroken was its surface. You might have traced the same roller, which had just lifted their own boat's keel, miles upon miles away, till it finally broke against the Hag's Head or got lost somewhere in the direction of Miltown Malbay. Everywhere the black bows of other currachs peered up mysteriously, looking like the heads of walruses, dudongs, or some such sea-habitants ; now visible above the shining surface ; now lost to sight ; then suddenly reappearing again. It seemed as if they were amusing themselves by some warm-weather game of floating and diving.

Summer had come at last, there was no doubt of that fact ! As Murdough and Grania walked down to the boat the air had been full of all manner of alluring promises. The year had at last awakened, and even those small epitomes of desolation, their own islands, had caught the infection, their usual ascetic aspect having given way to-day to one of quite comparative frolicsomeness—the sort of frolicsomeness suggestive of a monk or a nun upon an unwonted holiday. At the

point where they had got into the curragh the sand was one mass of silene, spreading its reticulated net in all directions. Across this green net the still young rays of the sun had struck, lighting up the thin long stems and white pendulous flower-heads, which sprang up again every time they were trodden down, nodding, and nodding frantically, in breezy, reckless defiance of any such accidents.

Even out here, in the middle of the bay, there was an extraordinary sense of lightness—a sense of warmth, too, of gaiety and elation. The distant headlands, generally swathed to the very feet in clouds, wore to-day an air of quite Italian-like distinctness, joined to a not at all Italian-like sense of remoteness and distance. It was a day of days, in short! A day to write up in red chalk; a day to remember for years; not a day, alas! likely soon to recur again.

Grania felt foolishly happy. Not for a long time, not since she had first known for certain that Honor must die, hardly since she and Murdough had been children together, had she felt so light, so rid of all tormenting thoughts, thoughts all the worse and more tormenting from their being so imperfectly understood. Her heart seemed to leap and bound under her old patched bodice, though she sat erect and decorously upon her narrow thwart, watching the line as if no other thought for her existed in the whole world. Inside that old bodice, however, a whole dance of glad young fancies were flitting to and fro and up and down. The world

was good, after all, she thought—good! good! good!—at least *sometimes*!

Mackerel-fishing is, fortunately, not a business of too strenuous a nature to be enjoyable. Your line bobs easily and pleasantly along the surface in the wake of your boat. Your bait—a shining object of some sort, more often than not a scrap of the skin of the first victim—is artfully attached, not to the killing hook, but to the one immediately above it. At this the fish snaps—why, no fisherman can tell you—is caught by the hook below, pulled in, tossed to the bottom of the boat, your line is out again, and so the game goes merrily on—merrily for all save the mackerel, whose opinion naturally does not count for much one way or other.

Grania and Murdough were both expert fishers. She, if anything, was the more expert of the two, and her hand the quickest to draw in the line at the right moment. Her attention, too, never varied—in appearance—from the business in hand, whereas his was wont to be afloat over the whole surrounding earth, sea, sky, and universe at large. His powers of concentration were not, it is to be feared, improving. It is conceivable that many successive evenings devoted to the society of Shan Daly, Paddy O'Toole, Kit Rafferty—otherwise 'Kit the Rake'—also to that of the big barrel hidden away under the furze-bushes in the old villa, are not exactly conducive to a young man's steadiness of hand or his business-like habits. So far, happily, this one's natural good looks, and the all but absolutely open-air

life he led, had kept him from the prematurely sodden air of the young toppers of our towns. Still, there were signs, slight but significant, pointing in one direction—pointing grimly towards a brink which, once crossed, there is seldom, if ever, any crossing back again.

To-day, however, these signs were happily in abeyance. His eye was bright, his skin clear, the voluble superabounding Gaelic ran as nimbly as ever over his tongue; his shoulders squared themselves as broadly as ever against the soft green glassiness behind him; he looked as vigorous and as comely a specimen of youthful peasant manhood as heart of maiden sweetheart could desire.

On they floated—easily, buoyantly. Now and then one or other would give a few strokes of the oar, so as to keep the curragh moving and hinder it from turning round. The high-piled, somewhat picturesque point of Inisheer was from this position the nearest land in sight. Over it they could see the crenelated top of O'Brien's castle, which rises incongruously out of the middle of an ancient rath, a rath so ancient that its origin is lost in the clouds, and even tradition refuses to find a name for it, so that archæology has to put up regretfully with a blank in its records. Farther on three small grey cabins stood out, the stones in their walls distinguishable separately even at this distance; beyond these again twinkled a tiny, weed-covered lake with a crooked cross beside it; then three or four big monumental stones running in a zigzag line up one

side of a narrow bohereen ; then some more grey cabins, gathered in a little cluster ; then a few stunted, dilapidated thorn-trees, bent double by the gales ; then the broken-down gable-end of a church, and then the sea again.

‘Is it to Galway those will be going, I wonder?’ Grania asked presently, pointing to a curragh which three men were just lifting over a little half-moon of sand, preparatory to launching it.

‘No, it will not be to Galway, Grania O’Malley, they will be going—not to Galway at all,’ Murdough answered, turning round to watch them and speaking eagerly. ‘It is out to sea they will be going—to the real Old Sea beyond! That one there is Malachy Flaherty—the big man with the chin beard—and that is Pat Flaherty in the middle, and the little one yonder, with the red round his waist, is Macdara Flaherty. It is all Flaherties they are, mostly, on Inisheer ; yes, and it is all pilots mostly they are, too. Oh, but it is a good business, the piloting business!—my faith and word yes, a very good, fine business, I can tell you, Grania O’Malley! It is three pounds English, not a penny less, they will make sometimes in one afternoon—three pounds and more too! Macdara Flaherty, he has told me himself he did often make that when he would be out alone by himself. Macdara Flaherty! think of that! And who is Macdara Flaherty, I should like to know, that he should get three pounds? Just a poor little pinkeen of a fellow, not up to my shoulder! Glory be

to God! but it is a good grand business, the piloting business, and if I had been reared a pilot it is much money I should have made by this time, yes, indeed, and put by too, so I should. It was a very great shame of my father and of my mother that they did not bring me up to the piloting business, so it was! A big, black, burning shame of the two of them!’

Grania listened with a sort of sleepy satisfaction. Of late Murdough’s gorgeous visions of what, under other and totally different circumstances, he would have done and achieved had been less a pleasure to her than might have been expected. It is conceivable that they jarred a little too much with the actual reality. To-day, however, her mood was so placid that nothing seemed to touch it. She went on, nevertheless, with her fishing. That, at least, was wonderfully good. The mackerel kept rushing insanely at the bits of dancing, glittering stuff which lured them; snapping at them so idiotically and so continuously that already quite a big pile lay at the bottom of the boat.

After fishing along the coast of Inisheer they drifted in the afternoon some little distance southwards with the tide, until it carried them nearly opposite to the cliffs of Moher. They could see the huge pale-grey boundary wall, with all the joints and scars on its face and the white fringe of water at its feet. Then, when the tide had again turned, they followed it slowly back, till they had once more come to nearly the same spot they had occupied in the morning.

As the dusk came on Grania's contented mood seemed only to deepen and to grow more conscious. A vague, diffused enjoyment filled her veins. She wished for nothing, hoped for nothing, imagined nothing, only to go on and on as they were doing at present—she and Murdough always together, no one else near them—on and on and on, for ever, and ever, and ever. It was like one of her old childish visions come true.

A soft wind blew towards them from the Atlantic, sweeping across their own three islands. You might have thought that, instead of that inhospitable waste of saltiness, some region of warmth, fertility, and greenness lay out there in the dim and shadowy distance. The air appeared to be filled with soft scents ; an all-pervading impression of fertility and growth, strong to headiness, seemed to envelope them as they sat there, one behind the other. Now and then a dog barked, or the far-off sound of voices came from one of the islands ; otherwise, save the movements of the boat and the soft rush of the water around them, not a sound was to be heard. The warm air caressed Grania ; a sense of vague intoxication and happiness such as she had never before felt seemed to envelope her from head to foot. As it grew darker a quantity of phosphorescence began to play about upon the surface, dropping in tiny green rivulets from off their oars as they lifted them. It seemed to her as if the queer green glittering stuff was alive, and was winking at her ; as if it was telling her stories ; some of them old stories, but others quite new—stories that

she had certainly never heard or never understood before.

She looked at Murdough. They were nearly touching one another, though his back was to her. Beyond him everything was blurred and confused, but his shoulders in their yellowish flannel 'baudeen' stood out square and well-defined. A vague desire to speak to him filled her mind. She wanted it so much that it perplexed her, for what was there particularly to say to him at the moment? She did not know, all she knew was that she *did* want it—wanted it to a degree that was almost painful, while at the same time something else seemed to stop her, to stand in the way, to forbid her speaking to him. It was all very queer! She could not tell what had come to herself that evening.

The most unconventional of all countries under the sun, Ireland has a few strict conventions of its own, and one of the strictest of those conventions was standing like a wall of brass right in her path at that moment. True, she and Murdough were betrothed—might be said to be as good as married—but what then? Even if they had been married, married a hundred times, convention stronger than anything else, the iron convention of their class, would have forbidden anything like open demonstrativeness from him to her, still more therefore from her to him. She knew this; knew it without arguing or thinking about it; would not have dreamt of questioning it; could not, in fact, have done so, for it was ground into the very marrow of her bones,

was a part of the heritage, not of her race alone, but of her own particular half of that race. All the same, nature, too, was strong; the witchery of the night was strong; the whole combining circumstances of the moment were exceedingly, exceptionally strong. There was no resisting them entirely; so, stopping for a moment in her leisurely rowing, she stretched out her hand and laid it lightly for a moment upon his shoulder, at the same time holding up the oar so as to let the shining particles run down the blade into the sea in a tiny green cascade.

‘It is all on fire it seems to be, does it not, Murdougheen?’ she said tremulously.

He started. ‘My faith and word, yes, it does, Grania a veelish,’ he answered. ‘It is very like fire—very. A man would think that he might light his pipe by it; so he would! It is very strange; very!’

The intoxicating air had stolen, perhaps, a little into his veins also. And whether spontaneously or merely in mesmeric response to her touch upon his shoulder, he too stopped rowing, and turning a little backwards, rather to his own astonishment put his arm about her waist.

Grania blushed scarlet. Her head swam, but without a moment’s hesitation she put her face up to his, and they kissed one another. It was a genuine lovers’ kiss, their first, although they had been over a year engaged, a fact of which she was immediately and overwhelmingly conscious.

Profiting by the cessation of his labours, Murdough

presently pulled out his pipe, lit it—though not by the phosphorescence—sucked at it for a few minutes, and, thus refreshed, embarked upon a new disquisition upon the great advantages to be gained by being a pilot.

Yes, indeed, it was himself ought to have been one, so he ought, and if he had been a pilot, it is the best pilot upon the three islands he would have been—by God! yes—the very best! It was out beside the Brannock rocks—the farthest rocks of all—he would have stopped mostly, and stopped, and stopped, and stopped, no matter what storm might be blowing at the time, and waited until a ship came. And the very minute a ship came in sight—a real big ship, that is, from the East Indies, or, maybe, America, or, better still, California—then he would have rowed out to her all by himself. He would not have taken anyone with him, no, for he did not want to be sharing his money with anyone, but he would have rowed and rowed, out and out, till he got into the middle of the big Old Sea. And there he would have waited till the ship came close up to him, and then it was up upon the deck of it he would have got—yes, indeed, up upon the deck. And it was the captain himself, and no other, that must have come to speak to him, for he would not have spoken a word to any other man, only to the captain himself. And when the captain came he would have asked if he knew the way up to the Galway quay, and if he knew every shoal and rock and sandbank there was in the bay. And he would have thrown back his head

like that and laughed—yes, laughed out loud, he would, at the captain, for to go asking him such a foolish question. And he would have said that he did, and no man better, nor so well, not on all the islands, nor on the Continent, nor in Dublin itself—— ‘And if you do not want me, and if you will not pay me my full big price, it is not I that will go with you, no, not one half foot of me. And if I do not go with you, it is upon the rocks you will go this night, my fine captain, you and all your poor men—yes, indeed, upon the rocks this night, and be drowned every one of you—for there is no other man on Inisheer, no, nor on any of the islands, that dare bring you into Galway upon such a night, only myself alone. And I will not bring you in for less than my full price, so you need not think it. No, indeed, for why would I venture my life for nothing? Great King of Glory! that would be a foolish thing for any man to do—a *very* foolish thing! Is it for a fool you take me, my fine captain, with your gold lace upon your sleeves? Begorrah, if you do you are wrong, for I am no fool at all, so do not think it. Only I should be sorry for you and your poor men if they were all drowned, as they will be, God knows, this night, if you do not give me my full price!’

His voice went on and on, rising, falling, then rising again, the guttural many-syllabled Gaelic flowing and flowing like a stream. Some belated cormorants came flying across the water from Aranmore, uttering dull croaks as they went. The heavy smoke of the kelp-fires

trailed across the bay, and as the curragh passed through it, filled their nostrils with its sharp, briny scent, lying behind them as they passed like a bar of solid cotton. Sometimes, in the interest of his narrative, Murdough's voice rose to a shout, as he waved his arms in the air, shook his fist at an imaginary opponent, or looked appealingly at his auditor for a response.

Grania, however, never uttered word or syllable. She hardly looked at him, could not have told afterwards what he had been talking about, or what had passed them by. They took to their oars again after half an hour, and rowed slowly homeward, past the western extremity of the smaller island, foreshortened here to a low conical hill; across the Foul Sound, where the swell was breaking in puffs of spray across the skerries; on and on till once more their own island stood before them, its big rath making it seem from this point lower even than usual. It was very dark indeed now. They had to feel their way as they best could round the outlying reefs, all but grinding against them, till they finally ran the curragh ashore upon the single spit of firm sand just below the old church of Cill-Cananach. Dark or light, hot or cold, sunlight, starlight, moonlight, it was all one that evening to Grania. The world itself seemed to have changed; to stand still; to be a new world. Everything about and around her had changed—the sea, the sky, the boat, the rocks, the shore—above all, herself; herself and Murdough. She knew now what she had only guessed before—knew it

through every pulse and artery of her body. The old walls had broken down. The common heritage was at last hers—hers and, as it seemed to her, his also. They loved ; they were together. How, then, could the world fail to have changed ?

Even after they had at last touched the shore ; after she had got out of the boat and had helped Murdough to pull it up on the sands ; after they had left it behind them, with that queer, twinkling greenish water still flapping fantastically around its sides ; even then she seemed to herself to be still in a dream, still to be dazed, still to be walking amongst the clouds. She only came back fully to life and to ordinary reality again when they had left the sands, and the sea, and the green, uncanny phosphorescence behind them, and were mounting soberly, one after the other, up the narrow, shingle-covered track which led to the cabin.

CHAPTER VII

THE road from Cashla Bay past Spiddal into Galway is as grim a one surely as is to be found in these three kingdoms. Mile after mile it runs through a grey world of boulders, varying from the size of a hencoop to that of an average cottage. Mile after mile, and still you say to yourself that the stony deluge must have reached its limits, that the stones will soon begin to cease ; somewhere or other, a little farther on, at the next turn, there will be unencumbered fields again ; grass, perhaps ; possibly even trees ; at the worst an earth free from this soul-wearying, this eternal, interminable incubus of stones.

But no ; mile after mile, and still never a sign or hint of change, never the slightest diminution in their multitude. The straight road—good and level as all West Connaught roads are—runs on and on through this rock-encumbered wilderness as if it loved it. There are low drift-hills near at hand, stone-covered like the rest ; there are a few nipped and draggled-looking villages at long intervals ; there is a more or less misty glimpse of Connemara mountains occasionally to be had ;

also a much nearer view of Clare and the hills of Burren ; there is the bay, very near indeed, with, perhaps, a ' pookhaun ' or a hooker upon it ; now and then a stream dashes by, struggling with difficulty through its incubus of rock, and disappearing under a bridge ; otherwise, save stones, stones, stones, there is nothing till the Galway suburbs grow, grey and unlovely, upon your sight.

It was the day of Galway fair, the last of the great western spring fairs, and a large party of Aranites were on their way to it. Grania and Murdough were amongst them. Grania had her calf to sell, also a couple of pigs. Murdough had nothing to sell and nothing to do, but any opportunity of escaping for a few hours from Inishmaan, any prospect of stir, bustle, and life was welcome to him. It was he, therefore, who had urged Grania to go this time herself to the fair, instead of entrusting the calf and pigs to Pete Durane, who usually sold them for her, charging a modest commission for his own benefit upon the transaction.

She had at first demurred. She did not want, she said, to leave Honor. This was a perfectly true reason, but there were others as well. An inborn reluctance, a touch of savage pride had always hitherto made her shrink from facing the crowds and the bustle of the mainland. Ever since those early days of her trips with her father in the old hooker she had hardly set foot outside their own islands. There had been for her a sense of great dignity and importance in those old, lost, but never-forgotten

days. How, indeed, could there fail to be? To sail across the bay in one's own private hooker; to enter a harbour in it; the fuss and bustle of embarkation; the loud talk of the other hooker-owners with her father; the stares of the open-mouthed, bare-legged beggars and loafers upon the pier—such details as these had naturally given a sense of vague but vast dignity and grandeur to a small person sitting bolt upright upon her ballast of stones, and looking with a sense of condescension at all these new houses and faces thus brought, as it were, officially, under her notice.

After this to land, like anyone else, from a curragh at Cashla Bay, and to tramp tamely along a road, was a descent not easy to bring the mind to. Murdough, however, had so urged the matter, had pictured the delights of the fair in such glowing colours, had undertaken to look after her so energetically, to aid her so indefatigably, that in the end—the glamour of that fishing evening being still upon her—she had consented. Honor, too, had wished her to go, had arranged that Molly Muldoon should come and sit with her while she was away, had disposed of every difficulty, and had herself waked her up at three o'clock that morning so as to be ready to start at dawn for the curragh, looking so much better than she had lately done that Grania had been able to start feeling as if all was really going well, and all would still go well with her and with all of them.

And in the morning all had gone well. The

weather was very fine, though there was a suspicious movement and bustling up of clouds to eastward. As for the scenery, certainly a stranger would have seen little variation, save in point of size, between its stoniness and the stoniness of Inishmaan. To Grania, however, as to all whose eyes are not spoiled by too varied and too early an acquaintanceship with many landscapes, small differences made great ones, and there was enough variety in that morning tramp through those stone-encumbered pastures to cause an exhilarated sense of travel and enlarged acquaintanceship with a world as yet imperfectly known and visited.

To walk briskly along the wide, indefinitely extending road, with Murdough Blake beside her; to hear him expatiating, descanting, pointing out the different objects she was to notice; to look from right to left; to laugh and nod to other passers-by—all this surely was novelty, stir, and exhilaration enough for anyone! The group of Aranites tramped rapidly along in their cow-skin pampooties, their tongues keeping pace with their legs. In their home-made flannel clothes and queer shoes, with their quick, alert, yet shuffling tread, they formed a marked contrast to the ordinary peasants of the mainland, most of whom stopped short on encountering them, and a brisk interchange of guttural salutations took place. Yes, certainly, it *was* amusing, Grania thought. Murdough was right; it was a mistake to stay always in one place. One grew to be no better than a cow, or a goat, or a thistle growing upon the rocks. It

was good to look abroad. The world, after all, was really a large place. Why, beyond Galway there were actually other towns; Dublin even; that Dublin which Murdough was always talking about and pining to get to. Who could tell but what she herself might some day see Dublin? Stranger things had happened.

Matters went less well when they at last reached Galway. The fair is held in the middle of the town, in its main square, the Belgrave or Grosvenor Square of its fashion and importance. The crowd was already great, all the people from the country round having streamed in long before our more distant Aranites could reach the scene. To Grania's unaccustomed ears the noise seemed to echo and re-echo from every house around, big grey or white houses—enormously big in her eyes—and all strange, all full of people standing in the windows and looking out, laughing at the crowd below—that crowd of which she herself was but a solitary and an insignificant fragment.

She had considerable difficulty in discovering her own beasts, which had been sent by boat the night before so that they might be fresh for the fair, and even after she had found them the next difficulty of finding purchasers was to her inexperience absolutely paralysing. If Murdough had stayed with her and helped her, as he had promised to do, all might have gone well, but almost immediately after their arrival he had gone off to look at a horse, promising to return quickly, and had never done so. Left to herself, Grania soon grew utterly

miserable and bewildered. She was not frightened by the crowd, for that was not her way; but the noise, the shouts, the rude shoving, the laughter, the rushing to and fro of the animals, the loud thumps upon their wretched backs, the pushing of the people about her, the constant arrival of more cars, more carts, more people, more beasts, more big, excited men in frieze coats, the necessity of being constantly on the alert, so as to hinder oneself from being cheated—all this disturbed and annoyed her. Further, it offended her dignity, used as she was to moving at her own free will amid the solitude and austere silence of her own island.

Worse than all the rest, however, and deeper than any merely temporary vexation, was the sense of Murdough's defection. Why had he left her? why did he not come back when he had promised to do so? why *to-day*?—just to-day when everything had promised to be so happy? She scanned the crowd in every direction, growing from minute to minute more wretched, more and more hurt and angry. A burning, deep-seated anger such as she had never before experienced seemed to fill her veins. She was hot and cold at once; she was sick with vexation and disappointment. The end of it was that, after vainly waiting and looking about her, seeing him twenty times in the distance, and finding, as he drew near, that it was someone else, she suddenly accepted an offer for her calf from a cattle-jobber which was at least ten shillings less than she ought to have got for it, and, making over the two pigs to Pete

Durane, telling him to do the best he could with them, she darted away out of the fair, out of the town, retracing her steps almost by instinct along the road to Spiddal, her whole soul smarting under a sense of wrong and injury.

It had begun to rain while she was still in Galway, and as she advanced along the road the rain grew momentarily heavier. There was not a scrap of shelter of any sort, and before she had gone many miles she was drenched to the skin. The immensely thick red flannel petticoat she wore, in all other respects an admirable garment, is apt in the long run to become a terrible drag in such a downpour as this. Once soaked, it weighed upon her as though it had been a petticoat of solid lead, and she had again and again to pause and wring it out as she might have wrung a sponge. In spite of this she hurried on along the dreary, featureless road, hardly heeding where she was going, only filled with the desire of escaping from that dreadful fair, which to her had been a scene not merely of disappointment but something far worse—a breaking-down of this sweet, this newly-found, this hardly-touched happiness—a source of intense bitterness; of a bitterness how intense she herself hardly yet knew.

At last, though how long after she left Galway she could not have told, she once more reached the spot, not far from Cloghmore Point, where they had disembarked in the morning. No boat was ready to take her across; the men were all away; there was not even

a curragh to be seen, or, in her present mood, she might have attempted to get across the bay by herself. As it was, there was nothing for it but to wait till someone arrived. Once more, therefore, wringing out her petticoat and gathering up her hair, which had got loose in her race, she got under the shelter of a bank and sat down upon a stone, near to where a small stream was bubbling and trickling through a pipe.

It was a wretched spot. There were a few cabins a little farther up the road, but it did not occur to her, somehow, to ask for shelter in any of them. She simply sat still upon her stone under the bank, waiting for someone to come, feeling miserable, but almost too tired now to know why or about what. The rain beat upon her head ; the wind whistled round her ; the sea was a sheet of ink, save for here and there the white crest of a breaker. She was growing very cold after the heat of her walk, and her wet clothes clung closely. She had eaten nothing since the early morning. As regards all this, however, she was for the moment not indifferent merely, but unconscious of it.

Presently the door of the nearest cabin opened, and a woman came out, carrying a pail in her hand. She came directly towards Grania, who sat still on her stone under the pelting rain and watched her. She was a terribly emaciated-looking creature, evidently not long out of bed, though it was now getting to the afternoon. She seemed almost too weak, indeed, to stand, much less to walk. As she came up to the stranger she

gazed at her with a look of dull indifference, either from ill-health or habitual misery; set her pail under the pipe in the bank through which the stream ran, and, when it was filled, turned and went back, staggering under its weight, towards the door of her cabin again.

With an instinct of helpfulness Grania sprang up and ran after her, took the pail from her hands and carried it for her to the door.

The woman stared a little, but said nothing. Some half-naked, hungry-looking children were playing round the entrance, and through these she pushed her way with a weary, dragging step. Then, as if for the first time observing the rain, turned and beckoned Grania to follow her indoors.

Dull as it had been outside, entering the cabin was like going into a cellar. There was hardly a spark of fire. That red glow which rarely fails in any Irish home, however miserable, was all but out; a pale, sickly glimmer hung about the edges of some charred sods of turf, but that was all.

A heavy, stertorous breathing coming from a distant corner next attracted Grania's attention, and, looking closely, she could just distinguish a man lying there at full length. A glance showed that he was dead drunk, too drunk to move, though not too drunk, as presently became apparent, to maunder out a string of incoherent abuse, which he directed at his wife without pause, meaning, or intermission, as she moved

about the cabin. One of the brood of squalid children—too well used, evidently, to the phenomenon to heed it—ventured within reach of his arm, whereupon he struck an aimless blow at it, less with the intention apparently of hurting it, than from a vague impulse of asserting himself by doing something to somebody. He was very lamentably drunk indeed, and probably not for the first, or the first hundredth, time.

The woman indifferently drew the child away and sent it to play with the other children in the gutter outside. Then having set the black pot upon the fire, she squatted down on her heels beside it, heedless, apparently, of the fact that there was not a chance of its boiling in its present state, and taking no heed either of her visitor or of her husband, who continued to maunder out more or less incoherent curses from his corner.

Grania shivered and felt sick. Something in the look and extraordinary apathy of the woman, something in the hideous squalor of the house, affected her as no poverty—not even that of the Dalys at home—had ever done before. She raked together the embers, and put a few fresh sods of turf on the fire—seeing that the woman of the house was either too ill or too indifferent to do anything—then sat down on a low creepy opposite to her, feeling chilled to the bone and utterly miserable.

Something new was at work within her. She did not yet know what it was, but it was a revelation in its

way—a revelation as new and as strange as that other revelation two days before in the boat, only that it was exactly the reverse of it. A new idea, a new impression, was again at work within her, only this time it was a new idea, a new impression upon the intolerableness of life, its unspeakable hopelessness, its misery, its dread, unfathomable dismalness. Why *should* people go on living so? she thought. Why should they go on living at all, indeed? Why, above all, should they marry and bring more wretched creatures into the world, if this was to be the way of it? How stupid, how useless, how horrible it all was! Yes, Honor was right, the priests were right, the nuns were right, they were all right—there was no happiness in the world, none at all—nowhere! Murdough Blake?—well, Murdough Blake would be just like the rest of them, just like every other husband—worse, perhaps, than some. He wanted to marry her, it is true, but why? Because she was strong, because she owned the farm, because she owned ‘Moonyeen,’ and the pigs, and the little bit of money; because she could keep him in idleness; could keep him, above all, in drink; because he could get more out of her perhaps than he could out of another!

She looked suddenly across at the mistress of the house, and it seemed to her that she saw herself grown older. Evidently the other had once been a handsome woman, and was not even now old, only worn out with ill-health, many children, much work, much misery.

Her left hand, which she held mechanically towards the now rising blaze, was so thin that the wedding-ring seemed to be dropping off; her hair was still black, and hung about her emaciated face in draggled-looking coils and wisps like sea-weed. Staring at her in the dusk of that miserable hearth, Grania seemed to see herself a dozen years later: broken down in spirit; broken down in health; grown prematurely old; her capacity for work diminished; with a brood of squalid, ill-fed children clamouring for what she had not to give them; with no help; with Honor long dead; without a soul left who had known her and cared for her when she was young; with shame and a work-house on the mainland—deepest of all degradation to an islander—coming hourly nearer and nearer, and a maudlin, helpless, eternally drunken—

With a sudden sickening sense of disgust and yet of fascination she turned and looked again at the man, still swearing and squirming in his corner. All at once an overpowering feeling of revolt overtook her, and with a bound she sprang to her feet and ran out of the cabin and down the road. Anywhere, anywhere in the world would be better than to remain an instant longer looking at those two, that man, that woman! Who were they? Were they not simply herself and him—herself and Murdough?

It was raining harder than ever, but she went on a long distance, far away from all the houses, before she again crouched down, this time nearer to the shore,

under the shelter of a big boulder, there to wait till the rest of the party returned from Galway.

It was a dreary, and seemingly an endless wait, but they came at last. Half an hour at least before they reached her she could hear Murdough Blake's voice, far away up the road, and the minute he saw her he ran forward and began a long, involved account of all that had delayed him and prevented his return—how he had met Pat this, and Larry that, and Malachy the other, what they had said, done, and consulted him about. It was an even more involved account, and one that entailed a yet more profuse expenditure of vocabulary, than usual, and this and his looks showed that the proverbial hospitality of Galway had not belied itself. Grania answered nothing; accepted his explanations in absolute silence; sat looking in front of her silently upon her thwart all the while they were crossing back to the islands. She was so often silent that neither he nor anyone else in the boat noticed anything unusual. When they reached the shore, however, she turned instantly away, without a word to any of the rest of the party gathered together at the landing-place, and walked slowly home by herself to the cabin and to Honor.

CHAPTER VIII

It was what is called a turning-point, but there are many such turning-points in all lives, and some of them are important, and some not. One thing was lost for Grania, not to be recaptured again. The young exultation, the extraordinary elation of that evening in the boat she never again felt. It had not lasted long certainly, but it had been good while it lasted—very, *very* good. Why that day of the Galway fair should have killed it, utterly and unrecognisably, she could not have explained, but so it was. Murdough had behaved in much the same fashion often before: left her to herself, gone away, said he would come back and not done so, returned in the end more or less the worse for drink—but what of that? It was the normal state of things, a state to be reckoned with, hardly to be especially aggrieved by or astonished at. Why should the defection of one afternoon count when the defections of many previous ones had hardly counted at all?

There is no use in asking such questions, no use in such probings. Our probes are too short, and we simply miss the point we aim at. We know them each

in our own turn, recognise them more or less silently, more or less unwillingly, and there is an end of the matter. Grania, at any rate, did so. She recognised, silently and unwillingly, that she had been a fool; recognised it grimly and with bitterness. Bitterly too and silently she repeated to herself that Honor's way of looking at the matter *had* been the true one. Not as regards the joy, the peace, the glory that was to be attained; that was as inscrutable, as little believable as ever, at any rate, for herself, whatever it might be in the case of ready-made saints like Honor. Where she had been right was as regards this world. That part was all quite true. Happiness was simply *gustho*—nonsense—there was no such thing!

The two sisters clung very closely to one another during those long summer days—days which were to be the last of their life together—closer than they had ever done before. Grania had a curiously strong feeling that Honor's death would be for herself also the end of all things. It was a period, at any rate, beyond which she did not and would not look. A touch of desperation had got hold of the girl. Honor and Murdough! they had always been her world; she had no other—anywhere—and now both seemed to be crumbling, both to be failing her.

One of them certainly was. Honor was sinking rapidly. Her emaciation could hardly be greater, but her power of taking food was daily decreasing and her strength waning; the end plainly was very near now.

Towards the middle of August a spell of oddly hot, dull weather fell upon the islands. The sea seemed to go to sleep. The gulls and puffins hung along the edge of the shore like so many tame ducks or other barnyard creatures, bobbing lazily upon the small crestless waves, but without energy apparently to carry them farther. Soon rows of curraghs with barrels stuck upright in them might have been seen passing at intervals to and fro to Cashla Point, going empty, returning full. There had not been any rain for four weeks past—a state of affairs which meant a water-famine for Aran.

Honor suffered from this warmth and closeness as she had never appeared to suffer from the cold and the blustering winds, a condition of things to one of her rearing too natural probably to have any effect one way or other. Night after night during that hot, dry spell she lay awake, although she always tried to persuade Grania that she was sleeping soundly, so as to induce her to lie down and get some sleep herself. Every now and then, however, a low, dry cough, breaking from her corner, or the feeble sound of her voice raised in some softly-uttered supplication, belied the kindly pretence.

One night, towards the end of the third week of August, these fits of coughing had been unusually long and bad. From about seven in the evening till long past eleven the hard, hacking sound had never ceased for an instant, and the consequent exhaustion was intense. Grania had sat the whole time with her arms about her, supporting her, and feeling, as she had often

done of late, as though she herself was receiving support from that contact as well as giving it. From time to time she gave Honor some water or a little whey to drink, or renewed the dip candle which stood upon the shelf, but they hardly spoke. What, indeed, was there for them to say?

Something in the dull warmth of the night, something in her own restless unhappiness, something in the sense of the nearness for Honor of that brink which, to her, too, seemed to be the end of all things, made Grania even less able to bear patiently the other's suffering that night than usual. Her love for Honor, which seemed to herself to have increased tenfold of late, her admiration for her extraordinary patience, that sort of wild anger and revolt which the suffering of those we love is apt to awaken in us, they all worked together in the girl's mind, until at last, when the paroxysms were beginning to abate, they broke from her lips in the form of an angry protest.

'How you do bear it, Honor—all night and day too—never a bit of ease or comfort! I do not understand it, no, I do *not*! If it was me I should just fight, and kick, and scream; yes, I should! I should curse everything, yes, everything—and God! I should curse and I should fight till I died fighting, so I would; no other!'

'Och, then, whist, whist, with your wild talk, child,' Honor exclaimed, breathlessly. 'Fight God! Is it sensible of what you're saying you are, you poor,

ignorant child, or gone clean mad you have this hot night? Listen to me, Grania, and come a bit closer, for I can't speak loud. Don't think I'm any better than yourself, child, for I'm not, ne'er a bit, and for patience, it is out of all patience I am, often and often, times upon times beyond number, out of all patience, and longing to die and be quit of it all. "What is the use of it, my God," I say, "what is the good or the sense of it? Is it any glory or honour you can get out of the likes of me, lying here, and coughing my heart away? Sure, my God, isn't it enough? Won't you give me the bit of ease, and I suffering so bad and so long? Sure, my God, what is the meaning of it at all, at all? Is it with all the saints about you up there in glory and grandeur, you'd want to be looking down at a sick lone woman lying on her back out on a poor little bit of a bare rock in the middle of the salt, salt sea?" And then, Grania dear—well, 'tis like this—there's a feeling, I can't tell it to you, for I haven't the words, nor couldn't if I had them itself. 'Tis for all the world as if someone was saying, "There, there! Whist with you; whist, I tell you! I know how you feel, you poor creature! I know it! I know it! There, there! Be easy a bit longer; it's coming to you; its coming! I'm sending it—the peace, and the joy, and the rest of it." And then, Grania, I look out towards the Old Sea there, and I say to myself, "It's coming! It's coming! It's on the way! My God, it's on the way; it's on the way!"' Honor

crossed her hands, and her white face shone wonderfully.

Grania's lips twitched; her eyes filled uncontrollably; she made a violent effort to brave it off, but it was not to be done. All the trouble of the last few weeks, all the bitterness of this new discovery—a discovery which was secretly eating into her very flesh—the sight of the suffering so patiently borne by her sister; it all seemed to come upon her at once. The barriers broke down; the floods carried all before them, and she burst out crying. It was like a child's crying, so loud, so open, so unconcealed, once it had got free.

'Auch! Auch! Auch! What'll I do! Auch, my God, what'll I do?' she exclaimed, sobbing. 'Say, Honor agra, what'll I do at all without you? Is it leaving me you'd be, leaving me all by myself in this big cold world? Auch! Auch! What will I do? Auch, my God, my God, what will I do?'

Honor turned towards her, astonishment in her mild eyes.

'Sure, pulse of my soul and heart of my heart, 'tis *well* you'll do,' she said, coaxingly. 'Arrah, then, I don't mean just at first'—for Grania made an angry gesture of denial—'but after a bit—when the grief is a little easy, as it will be, and when you can think of me as I shall be, well at last, and going with the help of the saints to be better still. Sure, what am I but a charge to you, and have been these years upon years

past? And for the house and the creatures and the rest of it, is not it your very own they are and always have been, and you the first in the world for cleverness and management, and that not on Inishmaan alone, but the two other islands as well, not to speak of the Continent itself? And for anything else, sure you know there is not a boy on the island that isn't after you, so that you could marry, you could, if you had six hands for them to be putting rings upon, or seven, instead of one, and Murdough Blake himself at the head and top of them all!'

By this allusion to Murdough Blake, Honor had thought to touch the right chord, and to remind Grania of all that still remained to her after she herself was gone. It had exactly the opposite effect, however.

'Murdough Blake! Murdough Blake! Wisha! 'tis little *he* cares for me, no more than he does for old Moonyeen out yonder!' she exclaimed, fiercely. 'Tis the house and the beasts and the bit of money *he* cares for, if he cares for anything, so it is—that and himself!'

It was the first time she had ever admitted such an idea in words, the first time that the long pent-up bitterness had ever crossed her lips. Pride, modesty, custom—the last the strongest barrier of the three—had hindered her from touching upon such a subject, even to Honor. Even now the words were no sooner uttered than a rush of shame overtook her—of shame and a feeling of self-betrayal. She grew red up to the

roots of her hair, got up, stammered something about seeing to the beasts, snatched up her petticoat, which was lying near her, and ran out of the cabin into the darkness before Honor had realised what she was about, or could utter a syllable to detain her.

CHAPTER IX

SHE did not go very far. Only as far as to the end of the platform, stopping at her usual spot, close to the big granite boulder which blocked the mouth of the gully. Her head was spinning; wild thoughts came and went in it, without, as it seemed to her, her having anything to say to them. She was tingling from head to foot with the sense of self-betrayal, a betrayal not so much to Honor as to herself, to the world at large—to the birds of the air and the stars above them—letting them all know what pride, decency, self-respect required to be kept for ever locked up and hidden away.

The fact is, though it is difficult for an outsider to believe it, that the whole subject of love, of passion of any kind, especially from a girl and with regard to her own marriage, is such an utterly unheard-of one amongst Grania's class that the mere fact of giving utterance to a complaint on the subject gave her a sense not merely of having committed a hideous breach of common decency, but of having actually crossed the line that separates sanity from madness. Could she really be

going crazy? she asked herself. Would she soon be seen gibbering by the roadside like mad Peggy O'Carroll, who was always laughing to herself at nothing, and being mocked at by the boys as they drove the kelp donkeys to and from the sea-shore?

What ailed her? she again asked herself. What *did* ail her? It seemed to be literally like some disease that had got into her bones—this strange unrest, this disturbance—a disease, too, of which she had never heard; which nobody else so far as she knew had ever had; a disease which had no name, and therefore was the more mysterious and horrible. As a matter of fact, she was to some extent ill, or rather her usually perfect health had for the moment partially deserted her. Close attendance on Honor, many sleepless nights, trouble of all kinds, the wear and tear of nursing, all these had broken down those good solid barriers which a life spent eternally in the open air would otherwise have kept up. Sturdy, too, as she was, there was nothing bovine in her strength; on the contrary, like most Irishwomen, she was a nervous creature at bottom, however little she might have seemed so when those barriers were in their proper place. At present they were gone. She was unstrung, and we all know what that means. So completely was this the case that she had even become aware of it herself. She felt worn out, and wrought up to a pitch of desperation. Something she must do, she felt, but what, that was the question, what?

She went to the edge of the platform and put her

head against the big boulder, invisible but still present, a familiar object sustaining and comforting. Stooping down, she pressed her cheek closer and closer against the gritty surface till it began to hurt her. What ailed her? she once again asked herself, what *did* ail her? what did it all mean? 'Auch, what will I do, my God, what will I do, at all?' she moaned suddenly, speaking aloud into the friendly deaf ear of the night. 'Arrah, if I was but dead! if I was but dead! My God, if I was but dead, wouldn't that be the best way out of it, at all, at all?'

She did not mean this, by the way, in the least. She did not want to die, to be dead. Life was bounding and beating within her, on the contrary—beating to the point of pain. It was a protest merely, a voice from the very strength of her youth and her love. She asked for death, as all young creatures ask for death when what they really want is life—only life with a difference.

By-and-by, as the air began to cool her, or the old stone brought counsel, she tried to think the matter out, to get a little away from her trouble, and to look at it with some degree of reasonableness. Thought to one of Grania's rearing and powers of comparison and deduction is a queer, dim process, very strange in its methods, very mysterious often in its results. In its own fashion, however, it has to be gone through, and is gone through, especially under the stress of strong emotion. Under that stress she now began to try and consider the

matter; to try and see if there was not some way to be found of getting rid of this new, this utterly intolerable, wretchedness. What if she made up her mind, she asked herself, to give up Murdough—now, at once, to-night—surely that would give her peace if anything would? She was not bound to marry him, and if she were, his tipsiness and ways of going on recently would be excuse enough, if she wanted or cared about an excuse, which she did not. She lifted her head, and tried to think this new idea clearly out; to see what it was, and where it led to. Yes, to give him up! to be free; completely free. Surely that was the right thing to do—the right thing and the spirited thing! Yes, she would do it, she resolved. She would see him herself—to-morrow morning the very first thing—she would see him and she would tell him so, that she would.

A glow of tingling satisfaction shot through her as she thought of meeting Murdough the first thing in the morning, and telling him in an easy, off-hand fashion that she had made up her mind and that she was not going to marry him, that he need not think it, for she had quite made up her mind. Stay, would it not be even better, she next reflected, if she could tell him at the same time that she was going to marry someone else? *Someone* else, yes; but who else? That had to be decided. Who was there that she could declare on the spur of the moment she intended to marry instead of him? Well, why not Teige O'Shaughnessy? she thought; poor Teige O'Shaughnessy, who was so sober,

so industrious, so hardworking, so exactly everything that Murdough was not; who would leap out of his very skin with joy at the bare idea; who would not even need to be informed beforehand; who would do everything she wished: obey her, follow her, worship her all his life, she instinctively knew, just as Pete Durane obeyed, followed, and worshipped Rosha, badly as that termagant treated him.

The idea seemed for the moment a perfectly brilliant one, a haven of refuge, a complete solution for all the miseries of the past few weeks. It stood out before her as a splendid spirited programme, brimful of satisfaction, brimful, above all, of a delightful promise of vengeance. Murdough's rage, Murdough's scorn of poor Teige, Murdough's fury at herself, Murdough's attempts to change her resolution, her own air of jaunty indifference—a sort of parody of his former ones—surely, surely it should be done, and done, too, the very next day!

She got up and moved about the platform with a sense of having regained her old liberty, with a sense of being once more Grania O'Malley, the cleverest, strongest, richest girl on the whole island. She was about to return to the cabin when—suddenly, like a thunderbolt—the reaction came. She stopped short with a feeling of absolute terror, a feeling of having taken some irrevocable step, a feeling of sheer panic. 'Oh, no, no, no, no, no!' she cried aloud. 'Oh, no, no, no, my God! Sure you *know* I didn't mean it. You know right *well* I didn't. 'Twas only mad I was! just

mad, out and out, no other!'—— Mean it? Better be ill-used by Murdough; beaten by Murdough; toil, drudge, be killed by Murdough; better have her heart broken; better have to give up the farm, and be ruined by Murdough, than live prosperously and comfortably with anyone else! The thought of the cabin seen a few weeks before at Cashla rushed back suddenly upon her mind, but now with none of that previous sense of disgust, none of that horror of revolt and loathing which had filled her then. Even in this extremity, even so, dead drunk in a corner, Murdough was still Murdough—the first; the only one. Idle? yes; tipsy? yes; cold, unkind, indifferent even? yes, yes, yes, still he was *Murdough*, her Murdough, always the same Murdough, and what did anything else matter?

The love that had come down from the very beginning of things, the love that had never known a break, the love that was a part of herself, a part of everything she saw and touched, of everything she could imagine, the tenderness that had curled itself subtly into every fibre of her body, was not to be dislodged in so summary a fashion. It clung tenaciously; clung only the harder because it ought to be dislodged, because she herself wished to dislodge it. A sudden wave of desperate love, of tender, reckless passion, swept through her, and she stretched out her arms.

'Auch, Murdough, *Murdougheen*,' she murmured tenderly. 'Where are you, Murdough? where are you then, at all, at all, this dark night? Arrah, come to

your poor Grania! Where are you, dear? where are you?’

She ran back to the edge of the platform, and flinging her arms again about the boulder, pressed her cheek against its gritty irresponsive surface. It was like a reconciliation! There had been a quarrel, and now there was no quarrel; none! She and Murdough; she and Murdough; always, always, *always* she and Murdough. The warm dark night about her, the scarcely audible note of the sea upon the rocks below, the stars blinking sleepily overhead; they all seemed to be so many witnesses and assurances of that reconciliation.

CHAPTER X

YET she did not after this seek him out, or try to make their relations closer in any way. On the contrary, it was a few days later that the first serious quarrel of their lives occurred. Murdough had not been near her for over a fortnight. She did not even know where he was, for he had got into the habit of being continually away on the mainland, no one knew where or for what. Late one afternoon, however, he came and beckoned mysteriously to her to come out on the platform and speak to him. He was evidently—for the moment, at all events—as sober as a judge.

She went. There was a worn, dragged look about her face, due partly to watching, partly to anger, partly to the cross-fire at war within her. She was longing to quarrel fiercely with him; to have it all out; to rage and storm at him; to startle him, if she could, with her anger; and then—and then—to tell him that she loved him better than all the world besides; that she would do anything he liked; that she did not care how he behaved, not even how often he got drunk, if only he would not leave her always alone, if only he would care

for her a little, very little, more. The recollection of that evening in the boat still clung and clung to her very heart-strings. The sun was setting as she came out upon the platform; a warm wind swept round the rocks; the little tansies and saxifrages were all bathed in the dusky yellowish light.

Murdough had something important to say, however, and, therefore, wasted no time in useless and quite unaccustomed preliminaries.

‘Then I would not have called you out, Grania, for I know you do not like to be called, and that is why I have kept away so much, so it is,’ he said, with his customary air of ingenuousness. ‘But to-day it is in a little bit of difficulty I am again, a little bit of trouble and difficulty, so it is to you I have come.’

She put her back against her old friend, the boulder, and waited to learn what she was to do.

‘It is just a little bit more of the money that I want you to give me, that is what it is; yes, indeed, nothing more,’ he went on, with the same air of ingenuousness, smoothing down his hair as he spoke. His eyes looked as clear that evening, the rascal, his whole aspect as fresh, vigorous, and wholesome as though he had never tasted anything stronger in his life than buttermilk.

‘Thirty shillings it is this time, and it is to Micky Sullivan of Aillyhaloo that I owe it, and he is a hard man, is Micky Sullivan! My God, yes, a very hard man, everyone knows that, a real nigger. He will not wait one week for his money, he says; no, nor a single day.’

An angry light was beginning to awaken in Grania's eyes.

'And why should I give you thirty shillings for Micky Sullivan, Murdough Blake?' she said, in a tone that had a suggestion of distant thunder in it. 'It is a great deal of money I have given you this quarter already, so I have—a great deal of money!'

Murdough looked hurt. There was every reason why she should give it in his opinion. She had it, and he wanted it. What better reason could there be?

'Then I did not think you would speak so to me, Grania O'Malley, I did not,' he answered in a tone of natural indignation. 'And for "a great deal," you have given me money three times, but not much at any one time, my God, no, not much at all! Fifteen shillings it was once, and seventeen shillings another time, and twenty-two shillings another. That is not much, even when you put it all together, not much at all. There is young Macdara O'Flaherty, he will spend two, three, four pounds, real gold pounds, right off and think nothing of it. I did not think you would speak so, Grania O'Malley, when all the world knows that we two are to be married shortly, and you such a rich girl.'

The angry light in Grania's eyes grew stronger. She set her back squarely against her old friend. She was going to have her turn for once.

'It is not the rich girl I would be, not the rich girl, but the beggar; yes, the beggar, and nothing else, out

upon the cold, naked rocks, that is what I should be, if I were to marry you, Murdough Blake, so it is!' she exclaimed, striking the stone beside her, anger upon the subject she did not greatly care about breaking loose, because anger upon the subject that she did care about must perforce be kept hidden away. Once begun, however, it was easy enough to go on upon this topic.

'For it is the shame and the talk and the disgrace of the world you are getting to be! There is not a man, nor a woman, nor a child, down to the youngest on Inishmaan, but knows you, and knows that it is the truth! Drinking and drinking, and making a heathen beast and fool of yourself, gadding about the town from morning till night, always drinking, drinking, drinking! Is it to make a *bauilyore* of myself that I would be giving you my money and be marrying you? then I will not do it, so do not think it. I will not make a *bauilyore* of myself for any man that ever was born. Do you think it is the wife of a man like Shan Daly that I want to be? to be working and working for ever, and him drinking the whole world dry, and spending the money faster than I could make it if I had six hands and more? No, indeed, that is not the sort of man I will marry, so I will not! It is a good man, and a sober man, and a decent man I will have, and no other will serve me, not if he were the only man in the whole world and the king of it, so you need not think it! And that is my last word to you, so it is, Murdough Blake, my very last word, God help me, therefore you may believe me.'

She stopped short, hot and panting. The words had rushed out with a fluency quite unlike her usual utterances. They were driven by that fierce current behind them. They came in this form simply because they were longing, but forbidden, to come in quite another one.

Murdough was genuinely astonished. Those secret currents, pent up, longing and struggling madly to find an exit, were invisible to him, and quite unsuspected, but that Grania would dream of changing her mind about marrying him had never so much as dawned upon his imagination. If his notions about love and all that belonged to it were of the dimmest, his notions about himself and all that belonged to himself, including his obvious desirability as a husband, were of the clearest and most definite character. Grania belonged, too, to him, always *had* belonged to him, no one else had ever pretended to rival him in her eyes. Her admiration of him, and of his various gifts and graces, had been patent to all men; she had never concealed it, or attempted to conceal it. All Inishmaan knew that in her eyes there was no one like him either on the island or off the island, and that a mere occasional lapse from sobriety, a mere occasional demand for a little extra ready money, that trifles of this sort could seriously be held a reason for giving him up was too ridiculous an idea to find entry readily into his mind.

He cast about for a minute how to answer. What did she mean? What was she driving at? Who had

been putting notions into her mind? Was it Honor, or who? That his wisest course would have been to be a little affectionate to her; to have appealed to her affection for him; to have put his arms round her; nay, if so wild, so utterly unprecedented a course had proved necessary, to have actually gone so far as to kiss her; that *this* was what she wished, what she was waiting for, he did not know in the least. It was a great pity there was no one at hand to tell him so, for he was really an exceedingly intelligent young man, quick to take a hint, and would doubtless have essayed even this unpractical method of argument had he known it to be the one most likely to succeed under the circumstances. He was by this time very much in earnest, and had no idea of being in his turn made a *baulyore* of, as she had said, and a laughing-stock before all Inishmaan. He did not know it, however, and the result was that natural annoyance prompted him to take up quite a different line, one not nearly so well calculated to be successful. It was an error of judgment, but to such errors even intelligent people are occasionally liable.

‘Begorra, this is grand news you have for me this evening, Grania O’Malley, so it is!’ he exclaimed, with a loud laugh, though his face was red, and an angry look in his eyes betrayed some lack of indifference. ‘Grand news, glory be to God, and ’tis myself is obliged to you for telling it to me! And who is it that you’re going to take up with, now you’ve given me the go-by, if you’ll be so polite as to tell me? ’Tis some rich

gentleman over from the Continent, I'll be bound, that you have been putting your *comether* upon, or, maybe, a lord from Dublin? Gorra, 'tis the proud place Inishmaan will be when it sees him coming to carry you off! my faith, yes; the proud place and the proud people we'll be, every one of us! Sure, how could a poor young fellow like myself have any chance with you, so grand and so proud as you'll be? Musha, it's not Irish will do you then to speak, I suppose, but the best of fine scholar's English, and a grand house with a slate roof on it you'll have no doubt to live in, and a servant, please God, or maybe two, to wait on you. Och, glory! glory! it *will* be the great day for Inishmaan when Grania O'Malley is seen sailing off with her new husband the lord from Dublin! *Wurrah! Wurrah!* the grand day, please God, and no mistake.'

The jeering tone, the laughter, the sting of all this from Murdough, *Murdough*, of all people in the world, lashed Grania to madness. She looked wildly round her for a weapon—physical or otherwise it mattered little—blind, helpless anger possessing her. Suddenly the remembrance of her thoughts a few nights before—of her momentary notion about Tiege O'Shaughnessy—returned to her mind, and she seized upon it. It was a poor weapon, as she probably knew, but it was the only one visible upon the spur of the moment.

'Then it is no gentleman I am going to marry, so it is not! no gentleman at all, for it is enough of fine,

idle gentlemen I have had, God knows, and that is the sort I am tired of!' she exclaimed. 'It is a quiet boy and a decent boy, and a poor boy that I am going to marry, one that will work hard, and not drink, drink, drink, day and night, till he doesn't know his one hand from the other, or the floor from the roof over his head, or the sun from the moon, or the grass from the stones, or God's green earth from the salt black bottom of the sea! It is a good man and a faithful man, and a man that will love me, and care me, that is the sort of man that I want and that I am going to be married to, so I am. And if you wish to know the name of him, it is Teige O'Shaughnessy, and *that* is the man I have chosen, and whom I am going to marry, so it is, Murdough Blake; the very same, no other!'

Murdough stared at her for a moment in open-eyed astonishment. Then he burst into a still louder laugh, a laugh that might have been heard right across the island. This time it was quite a genuine one. His vanity, which would have been touched to the quick if Grania had thrown him over for someone whom he could by any possibility have looked upon as a rival, was left untouched, was even gratified, by the mention of Teige O'Shaughnessy, between whom and himself no such rivalry was in his eyes possible; nay, the very juxtaposition of their images was a sort of indirect compliment to himself. His sense, therefore, of the ridiculous was genuinely tickled. Besides, to do him justice, he did not believe her in the least.

‘Auch! then, glory, glory! Glory to God! and more power to you, Grania O’Malley, but it is the grand man, sure enough, you have chosen, so it is! The grand man, the handsome man, and the rich man, glory be to God! Och! but it is the right sight and show you will be when you and Teige O’Shaughnessy are married! Glory to God! the right sight and show, and the fine, straight, handsome husband it is you will have, bedad! Arrah! will you be so obliging as to tell me was it the handsome, straight legs of him, or the beautiful spotty face of him, or the fine colour of his hair that first took the fancy to? Or maybe it was the beautiful big house he has to give you on top of the rocks yonder? or the nice, sweet-tempered aunt he keeps in it, that will be such pleasant company to talk to when you are sitting there by yourself? My faith and word, Grania O’Malley, it is myself will laugh to see you and Teige O’Shaughnessy when you are man and wife! Gorra, I will tell you now what I will do—then I will, please God!—I will go out in a curragh, and will bring with me every bouchaleen upon Inishmaan, and we will all go out together on to the sea, and will follow you to watch and look at you, when you are on your way to Aranmore to be married to Teige O’Shaughnessy. Glory be to God! Glory be to God! it is the match you have got hold of, sure enough! my faith and word, the match! Och! ’tis killed I’ll be with the laughing!’ And he rolled to and fro upon the rocks.

Grania’s face was scarlet. She sprang forward till

she was within half a foot of him. Blind rage possessed her. She shook from head to foot, and clenched her fists in his face. A little more and she would have pummelled him soundly with them.

‘Out of this! Out of this! Out of it with you this very minute!’ she cried. ‘Get off this ground, and get off this rock, and go laugh somewhere else, for it is not here you shall laugh, so it is not! It is not here you shall come ever again, for I do not want to have you, and I do not want to see you, and I do not want to hear you, nor to have anything to do with you!—never again, so long as I live—never, so help me! And for my money, which is all you come for, and all you want, you need not be asking me for any of it again—not for Micky Sullivan, or anyone else—for I will not give you one thraneen more of my money, so I will not—I will throw it into the sea first. I will not do anything for you, and I will not see you, and for marrying you, I would not marry you, not if you were made of solid gold from head to foot, and were crowned King of all Ireland or of the world itself! For it is not such a husband as *you* I want, and so I tell you!’

She was back into the cabin and had shut the door before Murdough the fluent could utter another word. He stood for a minute or two longer upon the platform, then walked away rather soberly, scratching his chin as he went. In his sense of the intense, the delightful, the utterly convulsive absurdity of any comparison between himself and Teige O’Shaughnessy he

had momentarily forgotten the rather important errand upon which he had come to speak to Grania. He remembered it now, and it was with an uneasy sense that he had not perhaps managed his interview quite as judiciously as he might have done. It is all very well to be excessively witty and brilliantly sarcastic, but then, it interferes sometimes rather seriously with business.

CHAPTER XI

It was one of those victories, nevertheless, that cost more to the winner than the loser. The first rapture, the first keen tingling satisfaction of her explosion over, Grania was more miserable than ever. What had she done? she asked herself, aghast. Done? She had done the very thing, the mere thought, the momentary dread of which had all but scared her out of her senses a few nights before. Broken with Murdough! Of her own accord, actually of her own free will, she had broken with him; refused to marry him, refused to see him, refused to speak or have anything more to do with him. *Broken with Murdough!* Refused to marry Murdough! It was like breaking with life, it was like refusing to breathe the air, refusing to eat or to drink, refusing to move a limb! How could she do it? What! live on, on, and on; thirty, forty, fifty years, perhaps, and in all that time, in all these years, the interminable years that stretched ahead of her, no Murdough! *No Murdough?* Murdough wiped out of her life?—it was the sun and the stars, it was life itself wiped out! Nothing

could make such a vision endurable—nothing could make it even conceivable!

She went about her work, therefore, like a dazed creature; saw to the house, cared for Honor, fed the beasts; but it was as a body with no soul inside it—a mere shell. Was she herself, she sometimes wondered dully, or was she someone else? She really hardly knew.

Oddly enough, Honor seemed scarcely to notice that anything was specially amiss with her. This came partly from sheer physical weakness, and partly from that absorption in her own drama which all souls, even the tenderest, seem to feel at the coming on of death. Grania, besides, had always been a bit 'queer'; given to extremes—now elated, now depressed—and it did not seem to her that she was very much more so than usual. As to her being specially unhappy about Murdough Blake, that was a trouble quite out of Honor's ken, and not one of the things she would have dreamed of worrying herself over. That Murdough was lazy and wasteful, was given occasionally to getting drunk, was rather good for nothing and worthless generally, these were facts which, even if anyone had called her attention to them, she would probably have accepted placidly enough. No doubt he was most of these things. Why not? Wasn't it only to be expected that he would be, seeing that he was a man and a young one? Why wouldn't he be? Didn't God Almighty, for some mysterious reason of his own, make them mostly so?

A view so general, and at the same time so tolerant

in its pessimism, was not likely to be disturbed by any particular illustration of it. If anyone had, further, proceeded to point out that Grania was not likely to be happy, married to such a man, Honor, for all her sisterly devotion, would probably have replied, equally placidly, that no doubt she would not be happy. Why, again, should she be? People as a rule were not happy, nor meant apparently to be happy, and the married state especially stood before her mind as a state of natural and inevitable discomfort—one in which there was always a more or less troublesome and unmanageable male to be fed, looked after, and put up with generally. That it possessed any counterbalancing advantages; that it could, even at the start, be, for a woman, a state of especial happiness, she simply did not, for a moment, believe. She would have been too polite to contradict anyone who had chosen to put forward such an assertion, but in her own mind she scouted it utterly. ‘Arrah, holy Bridget! what could there be in it to make any woman in this earthly world *happy*?’ she would have said to herself. Her own private opinion was that all that was an invention got up by the men. *They* persuaded the women to believe there was something pleasant in it, and the silly creatures were fools enough to believe them. That was all. The whole thing was really exceedingly simple!

This being her standpoint it followed that the pangs of unrequited love were the last that would have been successfully laid bare before her. Of Grania’s future

she did, indeed, think incessantly, but it was a future that skipped over the next forty, fifty, or sixty years, and fixed itself only upon what lay beyond that trifling interregnum. Day and night her thoughts fixed themselves more and more in this direction ; hoping, interceding, imploring for the one that had to be left—left in a cold, ugly world—pleading that she might be brought in ; that her heart might turn ; that, sooner or later, they two might stand together safe—safe, as she put it to herself, in Glory—a place which, if it had no name, no inhabitants, no conceivable whereabouts, was still at least as real and as definite to her as those rocks, as yonder sea that she habitually looked at. It was the one thing that still troubled her ; the one thing that kept her from her peace ; perturbed her poor soul, and brought the tears into her patient eyes.

So they went on together, as others beside them have gone on, and will go on, till all things end, till all the books are written, and every story finished ; loving one another, that is to say, with a love which, on one side, at least, had gathered to itself all that, under other circumstances, might have spread over a considerable field, understanding one another as much—well, about as much as most of us contrive to understand one another—as much, in other words, as if they had never met, never grown up in the same nest, never eaten off the same loaf, never touched hands, or exchanged a syllable in their lives.

Poor Honor's sisterly petitions were not, it must be

owned, prospering, for Grania in these weeks was certainly not improving. A new recklessness had got hold of her. It was in her blood—for she came, upon both sides, of a wild, untameable stock—but it had never risen so near to the surface before. Circumstances had tamed her, as they tame most people; a certain sense of responsibility had tamed her; doubts and self-perplexities had tamed her; of late, too, that keen, hungry clutch at the heart had tamed her. Now she no longer cared, or thought that she no longer cared. The barriers were completely broken down; the floods were out and away; there was no knowing yet how far, or how furiously, they might travel.

One afternoon, about a week after her last interview with Murdough Blake, she had been up to Aillyhaloo, the village at the extreme south end of the island, to get some straw for Moonyeen, and was coming down the path with a great load of it on her back. The wind swept round and round her head with a sort of fickle, clamorous insistence, now rising to a wailing climax, then suddenly sinking, then as suddenly wailing out again. The sea was of a uniform grey, a few darker lines being drawn here and there across it as if by somebody's fingers. The Cashla coast, Spiddal, the whole line of the Connemara hills were lost and muffled in swathing, formless bands of mist.

Grania fixed her eyes steadily upon the path, which was all she could see, bent down as she was under her bundle. Her mind, except now and then under strong

emotion, still worked only as a child's mind works—vaguely, that is to say, with a sort of dim diffuseness—stirred by what came to her through her senses, but lapsing into vagueness again as soon as that direct impression had worn off. In this respect she was just what she had always been. The events that had recently happened had been events belonging to and affecting quite another region. Her mind stood aloof, uninfected, unenlarged, untouched by them.

A real event, by the way, had happened that afternoon. A party of people—English people, it was reported—had come over from Galway in a pleasure yacht, and had made the tour of the islands, visiting not Aranmore only, but the other two islands as well—a rare event at the present day, twenty-five years ago an almost unprecedented one.

As she came down, picking her way carefully over the stones, her mountain of straw towering behind her, Grania suddenly perceived that this party were coming right towards her up the path. It was the direct way to Dun Connor, the chief, if not the only, lion of the island, which the strangers, no doubt, were then on their way to visit. A ragged tangle of children followed them, shouting and clamouring for halfpence.

A vehement feeling of annoyance made Grania long to rush away, to hide herself behind a boulder, to do anything rather than have to encounter these strangers—gentry, the sort of people that Murdough was always talking about and envying—people who lived in big

white houses with staring windows like those she had seen in Galway. Pride, however, and a sort of stubbornness hindered her from running away. She went on accordingly down the path, and, when the contact became imminent, merely stepped a little aside, on to a piece of flat rock beside a stunted thorn-bush, and stood there—her cumbersome burden rising behind her—waiting till the visitors should have passed.

There were three of them—two ladies, and a young man escorting them. They came up laughing, evidently amused, and enjoying the sense of discovery—for Inishmaan was all but untrodden ground—a flutter of skirts and parasols, of hat-ribands and waterproof cloaks filling up the pathway.

Grania stood doggedly waiting—her head a little thrown back; something of the stir and stress that filled her visible in her whole look and bearing; a wild, untamed vision of strength and savage beauty, standing beside that crooked and stunted thorn-bush.

The visitors to the island were a little taken by surprise by it. One of the two ladies put up an eyeglass to look at her, at the same time touching her friend's arm so as to call her attention.

With an angry sense that she was being stared at, Grania on her side turned and gazed fiercely at them, her great slumberous eyes, so Southern in their darkness, filled with a curious lowering light.

The visitors passed hastily on up the track.

‘Did you notice that girl standing above the path-

way?' one of the ladies said to the other. 'How she stared! Did you observe? Not quite pleasant, was it?'

'Yes,' the other answered, clutching rather feverishly at her skirts. 'Don't go so quickly, dear. What stones! Yes, I noticed her. A fine, handsome creature, I thought—picturesque, too, in her red petticoat—but, as you say, not exactly pleasant-looking. Generally they have such good manners, poor creatures—quite decent, you know!'

They hurried on, for a storm was clearly coming up, and the yacht was not built for heavy weather. Quick, hot gusts of wind kept following one another over the grey, treeless surface of the island. The sea, too, sent up an occasional growl—a hint as to what might be coming. The visit to Dun Connor had accordingly to be cut short, and with a hasty glance at the wilderness of stone around them, the visitors turned down the path again, and betook themselves to the shore.

From her usual post beside the cabin Grania watched them stumbling over the stones in their haste and rapidly embarking, with a feeling of satisfaction in her own fierce sea and sky which had scared away these fine people so suddenly.

A dull wrath, like that of the coming storm itself, was in the girl's veins. She had passed Murdough early the same day—one of the O'Flaherties and Phil Garry were with him at the time—and he had ostentatiously gone on talking and laughing, without paying

the smallest attention to her presence. She, on her side, had passed him without a glance, but it had seemed to her as if every drop of blood in her veins had turned in that instant to boiling lead, and she could have killed all three of them then and there, without ruth or hesitation, had her means been only equal to her wishes. It was still burning dangerously in her, that dull wrath, made up of anger, inarticulate despair, of love turned for the time being into a sort of sombre hatred. The necessity, too, of concealing it from Honor made it all the worse and all the more perilously pent up within her.

As it happened, a mode of expending it came that very night, and the long mystery of the stolen turf was at the same time cleared up.

The promised storm came on to blow unmistakably about six o'clock, and by nine or ten o'clock it had grown to a regular tempest. North and south, east and west, it seemed to come from all directions at once. Warm scuds of rain fell as if from a bucket. Then the Atlantic joined the concert, its hollow, bull-voiced roar, full of suggestions of shipwreck, terror, and death, coming up unceasingly to them from below.

Poor Honor was rather frightened. The suddenness of the storm disturbed and distressed her. It seemed unnatural, this combination of heat and of rushing wind. It was a new thing to her experience, and seemed to forebode evil. From time to time the sound of her prayers could be heard coming from her own dusky

corner, the words caught and carried off, as it were, before they were half uttered by the rushing wind, which tore down the chimney and seemed to be bent, this time, upon dislodging the sturdy, much-enduring little house from its deeply-set foundations upon the rocks.

Grania remained huddled beside the hearth, without approaching the bed. She was conscious that she was not good company for Honor that evening, so kept away from her as far as possible. Suddenly, as they sat there, with the width of the cabin dividing them, a loud, piercing scream seemed to break between them. It was so close that both believed for a moment that it was inside the house. It was only the scream of a passing gull or gannet, scared, like the rest of the world, by the suddenness and peculiarity of the storm, but it had an oddly human, oddly articulate sound. It had hardly ceased, too, before, with a thump and creak of its hinges, the door swung suddenly open, with that peculiarly eerie effect characteristic of doors which open of themselves.

Honor uttered a low wail of dismay, and, clasping her hands together, began nervously to pray aloud—a queer mixture, half of Irish, half of Latin, escaping her lips. Grania got up and went to the door, picking up the iron poker from the hearth as she did so, and taking it with her, probably from a recollection of the well-known superstition that iron is a safe thing to have at hand if there is anything uncanny in the air.

She was turning back and was about to shut the door, when she noticed, to her surprise, a man's figure, rather the shadow of a man's figure, passing behind the low wall which divided the little yard from the unenclosed waste of rock without. Suddenly a thought shot through her, a vivid thought, a thought which grew like lightning into a certainty. Could it be? was it?—yes, it was—Murdough! Murdough repenting; Murdough come to see after them in the storm! It was—it must be! A flood of hope, bounding, tumultuous, almost painful; a sudden confused rush, first of vehement love, then of equally vehement anger, then of love again, broke across her brain, making her reel and stagger as she stood upon the threshold.

Telling Honor that she was only going to see that the beasts were all right, and would be back in a minute, she hurried outside, closing the door softly behind her.

Sure enough a figure was there, for she could still see it moving, the dim silhouette of a man's figure thrown against the rock. Grania watched and waited. Her heart was beating now so that it was an agony. The expectation of Murdough's approach, the thought of his coming, the touch of his hands, the nearness of his presence was so strong, so convincing, that it had already become a reality. A reality, alas and alas! it certainly was not. Another moment showed that no one was coming, no one at least to the door or anywhere near the door. In the dim light she could still distinguish the figure of a man, but it was a small man,

consequently it was not Murdough ; moreover, this man, whoever he was, was creeping stealthily behind the low wall that enclosed the cabin, and getting round to the back of it—to that part where the turf-stack stood piled.

Grania remained standing where she was, the poker clutched in her hand—all her hopes dashed ; all the thoughts of a moment ago turned forcibly back into a different channel. Her face, could it have been seen in the darkness, would have been a curious study. Passion was written on it, and passionate anger ; hungry, baffled love was there, and a not less hungry or less baffled desire for revenge. They were all there ; all working and struggling together. Suddenly she made a bound forwards ; she had crossed the yard ; she had seized the trespasser—had clutched him by the back of his neck—and was holding him as a mastiff holds a burglar. It was like Vengeance descended miraculously from the sky itself, so unexpected was it, so startling in the hurly-burly of that hot, wild night. An involuntary yell of terror broke from the turf-stealer, and he turned, wriggling like a worm, and struggling vainly to escape from her clutch, a clutch which was for the moment like iron. It was, as the reader will hardly need to be told, Shan Daly ! An old basket was beside him, already half full of turf, and there was a lump of it in each hand. Never was criminal caught more feloniously red-handed.

Grania's pent-up wrath had now found its channel.

The barriers were all up. The current was at the full. The wild blood of the O'Malleys, the wild blood of the Joyces—neither of them names which, for those who know the West, carry any mild or merciful associations with them—was hot in her veins like fire. Desperate rage, that rage for which killing seems the only alleviation, for the time being possessed her wholly. Her head swam, her teeth were clenched together, her right arm rose; the storm itself was not more reckless of consequences for the moment than she. A little more, another five minutes, and blood would have flowed over the rocks: for that iron poker in Grania's hands was no plaything.

A mere chance hindered it. A plaintive cry broke suddenly from the cabin. It was Honor's voice calling to her sister to come in, to come back, not to leave her. What was she doing? It was frightened she was of being alone by herself in the wild night. Grania! where was Grania? What was Grania doing at all?

The cry, so pitiful in its weakness, reached the other's ear even in all the height of her fury. What was she to do? she asked herself in the rapidly concentrated thought of the moment. Could she kill Shan Daly without disturbing Honor? That, probably, was the form in which the question practically presented itself to her mind. To kill him, or at least to beat him then and there within an inch of his worthless life, was clearly the thing to do, but to disturb Honor, to frighten Honor, that, under all circumstances, was to be avoided.

The result was that in the indecision of the moment her grip probably relaxed, for, with a sudden tug and the wriggle of an escaping conger eel, Shan Daly contrived to shake it off, writhed himself a few inches away over the stones, dragged himself beyond her clutch, half fell over the big boulder in his panic, then, picking himself up, fled down the hill, terror in all his limbs, but an intense sense of escape, of deliverance, tingling through every inch of his frame. For a moment he had seen the figure of Death standing over him with a poker in its hand, and the sight had scared him. If ever that dusky soul of his sent out a genuine ejaculation of thankfulness heavenwards, it was probably at that moment.

PART IV

SEPTEMBER AGAIN

CHAPTER I

THE month of September had begun, but the breach between Grania and Murdough was still unhealed. He, on his side, was feeling less at ease than his jaunty air or undisturbed manner might have led anyone to suppose. This unlooked-for decision upon Grania's part was, he could not but own, startling. So far he had kept the fact to himself, not choosing it to be known, and knowing that she was extremely unlikely to speak of it. It might have entailed unpleasant consequences had it leaked out. In Inishmaan, as in more imposing places, there are inconveniences likely enough to fall upon a brilliant young man when a marriage which is to set him upon his legs is known to be broken off.

What ailed her? he asked himself again and again. What an extraordinarily queer girl she had grown of late! he next reflected, thinking over the scene of their quarrel. What queer eyes she had!—'Tis as if the

devil himself was sitting at the bottom of them, and staring at you—the devil himself, no better—enough to scare a man, so they are! quite enough to scare a man!’ he repeated several times to himself, as he recalled the look of concentrated rage with which she had sprung upon him and swept him, as it were, out of her path in her fury. ‘’Twasn’t safe she looked, so she didn’t then—not safe at all. And what did I do to make her so mad? Only laughed at her about Teige O’Shaughnessy! My God, and who wouldn’t laugh at her about Teige O’Shaughnessy? *Teige O’Shaughnessy*, wish!’

That Grania would seriously dream of marrying Teige he did not for a moment believe, but that, even in anger, she should throw such a rival in his teeth was an insult very difficult to stomach. Murdough had never asked himself for a moment whether he cared for Grania or not, the question would probably have seemed to him utterly superfluous. Of *course* he cared for her. Had she not always been there; always, in a fashion, belonged to him? Why in the world *wouldn’t* he care for her?

That he had liked her better in the old days when she was still the little Grania of the hooker, before she had shot up into this rather formidable woman she had so suddenly become, there is no denying. The little Grania had admired him without criticism; the little Grania had no sombre moods; the little Grania never gazed at him with those big, menacing eyes—eyes such

as a lioness might turn upon someone whom she loves but who displeases her—the little Grania was natural, was comprehensible, was just like any other little *girsha* in the place, not at all like this new Grania, who was quite out of his range and ken; an unaccountable product, one that made him feel vaguely uneasy; who seemed to belong to a region in which he had never travelled; who was ‘queer,’ in short; the last word summing up concisely the worst and most damning thing that could be said of anyone in Inishmaan.

He brooded over all this a good deal, sitting and swinging his legs upon the steps of the old villa, which, since his grandmother’s death, he had taken pretty constantly to inhabit, it being preferable, in his mind, despite its bareness, to the overcrowded family cabin up at Alleenageeragh. That there was a sense of relief in being free from Grania and her ‘queerness’ he was aware, but, on the other hand, there was a yet greater sense of failure and of defeat. His vanity was badly hurt by it, likewise his pocket, and the two together acted as a powerful counterpoise. He was ‘used,’ moreover, to Grania. His future had always held her as a matter of course, just as hers had always held him, and use, more than all the other ingredients of existence, possesses a tremendous leverage upon beings of Murdough’s type. The end of his brooding was that one evening about a fortnight after their quarrel, and a couple of days after the scene between Grania and Shan Daly, he waylaid her as she was coming back from the

kelp fire, hiding for that purpose in an old clump of hawthorn-bushes till she should pass by.

This clump stood upon the flattest bit of land in the whole island, so that from it, as from a post of vantage, he could see a long way, miles it seemed, over the dim, still faintly-gleaming surface. Where he had hidden himself was the only spot that broke this flatness, a flatness sloping imperceptibly till it merged into the sea at high-water mark. It was a fine warm evening, though there had been heavy rain in the daytime. A quantity of small brown moths flew round his head, other and much larger white ones kept emerging one after the other from the nettles and brambles that covered the fallen stones, for, like almost every clump on the islands, this too held a well and a scrap of old ruined church hidden somewhere away at the bottom of it.

After waiting half an hour, he saw Grania coming towards him, the only living thing far as the eye could reach, everything else being either stone, or else vegetation hardly less grey and arid. As she came near an unexpected qualm seized Murdough, a sudden alarm as to what she might be going to say or to do; how she would behave when she saw him there. It was quite a new idea for him to dream of being afraid of Grania, or to doubt his own unquestionable superiority over her; but since their quarrel she had assumed rather a different aspect in his eyes, and this evening she looked, he thought, bigger and more imposing, somehow, than usual, as she came walking slowly towards him, solitary

and empty-handed, her eyes staring straight in front of her as if she were seeking something that was not there. The impression was so strong that it even occurred to him for a moment that he would let her pass, as he easily could do, and stay hidden away in his lair until she had gone by.

‘Arrah, great King of Glory, ’tis the mortal queer-looking girl she has grown to be, sure and certain!’ he muttered uneasily. ‘My soul from the devil, what ails her these times, at all, at all? She that used to be the nice, easy, little *girsha*.’

Whether he would have called to her or have let her pass unchallenged it is impossible to say, but it happened that as she drew near to the clump she slackened her already slow pace, and looked directly towards him, her eyes, as it seemed to him, piercing right down to where he stood hidden in the centre of the thorny thicket. Concluding, therefore, that he was discovered, he got up, and in rather a quavering voice called to her, and asked her to stop.

She started violently, and stopped dead short, then looked again, not directly towards him, but a little farther on, as if doubtful whether she had really heard a voice, or only imagined that she had done so. Murdough’s head and shoulders rising out of the clump was a piece of evidence not to be mistaken. Still she stood rooted to the same spot, staring at him, not speaking; staring as if he had been his own ghost.

What were they going to say to one another? What,

after their stormy parting, after that fortnight of silence and alienation, was the footing upon which they were to meet? Neither of them knew, and it was probably accident that decided that point. Murdough's inspiration was at any rate a happier one than his last had been.

'Then it was waiting to walk back to the house with you I was—yes, indeed—just waiting to walk back with you, that was all, Grania O'Malley,' he said, with a decided quaver in his voice, and an air of mild deprecation.

The tone and look, more even than the words, disarmed the girl utterly; further than this, they filled her with a sudden, a delicious sense of happiness. She said nothing, but when he had stepped over the mass of branches, and through an outer circumvallation of nettles, and had come up to her, she was trembling violently, and it was silently and still tremblingly that she turned and walked back beside him through the dusk, as they had so often walked before.

It was the only explanation between them, but it seemed to suffice. The first awkwardness of the meeting over, Murdough's tongue soon regained its nimbleness, and he began telling her a long tale about a curragh which he had bought or proposed to buy, if so be, God willing, he could find the money. It was Malachy O'Flaherty's own curragh, and the best in the islands, barring one, and that was Phil Garry's father's big curragh which had gone to the bottom in the great

storm on the twenty-eighth of January last. Poor old Mick Garry's heart would have broken to lose it, so it would, honest man, only, thank God, he hadn't long to fret about it, for he was drowned himself at the same time, and only that Phil Garry and his brother Teddy had stayed at home and hidden themselves, they would have been drowned too, as the little bouchaleen Pat was, who had been the only one of the family the old man could get hold of when he went out in such a hurry to save the nets. But Malachy O'Flaherty's curragh was a picture, fit for a king, and had been the first in of seven that had started at the Ballyvaughan races last March; at least seven would have started only that two never got off, for one of them broke her rudder the day before, and the other had a big hole stove in her side, through Thaddeus Doonan, that owned her, leaping into her in a hurry, the fool, with his boots on. She was the handsomest boat on the whole bay, and had been newly caulked and canvassed by Malachy himself only that very year. There was no curragh like her in Galway or out of it, and it was raging mad the Claddagh men were about it, for whoever owned her would be sure to win the big race that was coming on next month, with twenty boats starting and three shillings down to every boat. Twenty times three shillings would be sixty shillings, that was three pounds, and if he had to sell the coat off his back, and the shirt too, he'd do it rather than not have her to race in, for it was a sin and a shame letting her go to those who didn't know how

to row no more than black crabs down at the bottom of the sea. That was what Malachy O'Flaherty had said, and he had said, too, that he would give it to him dirt cheap, because he'd like to see her coming in first at the big race, and not let everything good go to strangers. What was the good, Malachy had said, of stinting and saving for ever? Was it when a man was old that he wanted the money most? No, it was not, it was when he was young, for how did he know he would ever live to be old at all, at all? Could you take the money into the grave with you? No, you could not, for money was of no use there, nor anything else either, when you would be dead and buried! That was what Malachy O'Flaherty had said, and it was quite true, so it was, quite true. It is not in the grave, nor in heaven either, with all the grandeur and glory you'd find *there*, you would be wanting money, whether it was much or whether it was little.

To all this Grania listened silently, as usual, turning her eyes upon him from time to time with a curiously lingering expression. There was a look of inquiry in her glance, a look of entreaty and expectation, a look of impatience, too, only it was impatience curbed and restrained by something stronger than itself. So they walked on side by side until they had reached the cabin. Here Murdough, whose tale was finished, was turning away, but she made a quick sign to him to stop; went in with resolute steps, came out again and thrust something hurriedly into his hands. It was a bank-note,

and all the money that she had at that moment in the world with the exception of a few shillings, and what must be kept absolutely sacred for the expenses of Honor's funeral.

Murdough's astonishment and delight burst out then and there like a fountain; burst into a torrent of words—vague, iridescent, incoherent. Projects of every sort—races to be won, victories over rivals, money, much money, to be earned in the future—they all poured forth; flew and hurtled through the air; one golden scheme jostling against another in its hurry to express itself. Grania listened, but her eyes never lost that oddly intent, wistful expression. She stood perfectly still while he capered about the rocks, waving his hands and snapping his fingers as he descanted first on one project then on another. Suddenly she turned, and, leaving him to finish his flights by himself, went in, closing the door behind her; not this time, however, with a bang, but slowly, with a gradual and, as it seemed, a reluctant pressure from within.

It was with a more conscious strut than usual that, after waiting a minute to see if she would return, Murdough marched off towards the old villa, the note she had given him making sweet music against his pocket as he did so. Money! Not a few paltry shillings, but a whole large sum at once. He was a king! There were no possibilities that were not open to him, no dream that might not be fulfilled, no hopes that might not suddenly bloom into life. Where was Teige

O'Shaughnessy *now*? he asked himself with derision. How long would it be before anyone gave *him* money like that?—the poor, mean, scraping, saving little *boccach*.

Through all this satisfaction there returned, however, from time to time the same vague uneasiness about Grania. She had only done what she ought; had given him the money right off in a lump, without any lecturings or bargains; that was all quite natural and proper, but, upon the other hand, what sort of wife would she be, this Grania, for a quiet, easy-going boy, who only wanted to live in peace and quietness? Wasn't she queer? Mother of Moses! she *was* queer! the queerest girl in the whole world! That was the burden, refrain, summing-up of all his meditations about her.

Once in the course of these meditations he chanced to look up and catch Shan Daly's ferrety eyes peering at him from their red-rimmed sockets as if he were trying to make out what he was thinking of, for Shan, too, had got into the habit of creeping into the old villa, preferring its shelter to the mud-banks and sides of walls which of late had been his habitual resting-places. The relative standing of these two had become exactly reversed since Murdough had grown to be a man, and a strong one. Formerly, Shan, we know, had bullied him unmercifully whenever he got the chance; now, Shan was his henchman, his jackal, the patient partaker of all his moods. It spoke a good deal for Murdough's good temper and inherently unresentful way of looking

at things, that he never showed the slightest inclination to avenge himself upon Shan, or to pay back his old wrongs as he easily might have done. On the contrary, though he despised him, as everyone did, he seemed rather to enjoy his society than otherwise. He was 'used' to him, you see, and that counted for so much. Have we not seen that he was also 'used' to Grania O'Malley? Between a man with no scruples whatever, no character to lose, no qualms of any sort save fear for his own skin, and a mere convivial young gentleman who has never done anything worse than get drunk and run into debt, the sense, too, of superiority is perhaps never wholly upon one side. Murdough knew nothing of Shan's latest adventure, but he had long had cause to suspect that Shan, for some reason, hated Grania. Several times he had been aware that it was Shan who had prevented him from going to see her, or who had egged him on to doing things she disliked. This, and a slight feeling of embarrassment upon the subject, kept him from telling him of her recent donation. All the same he was genuinely grateful for it, and in the first flush of his gratitude laid out a variety of schemes which he would, could, or might carry out in the course of the next few weeks to gratify her. 'Queer' she undoubtedly was, mysteriously, unaccountably queer, but at least her queerness had, this time, taken a right instead of a wrong direction!

CHAPTER II

As it turned out, there was no opportunity for any of these amiable schemes to be carried into effect, for the very next day Honor was taken suddenly worse about nine o'clock in the evening, and to all who saw her it seemed clear that the end had at last really come. There was great dismay amongst those who were drawn to the cabin by the news, not so much on account of the fact itself, as on account of the difficulty, the perennial difficulty at Inishmaan, of getting a priest across from the larger island in time. Grania had wanted to send Teige O'Shaughnessy for Father Tom that very morning, but Honor had forbidden her to do so, wishing to delay a little longer, so that the last rites might be received as near the end as possible. Now that end had plainly come, but to get a priest across the sound before the next morning was clearly out of the question.

It was a thick night, with showers of rain at intervals, but upon the first intimation of the change old Molly Muldoon had travelled faithfully across the rocks from Ballinlisheen, according to her promise, and after the other women had gone she remained to share in the

task of nursing, and to aid Grania in what both believed to be the last night of Honor's life. Towards three o'clock, every moment, it was thought, must see the end, but the chilly, fatal hours passed by, and Honor still lived. About five o'clock Molly had to go to see after her chickens, which 'would be mad,' she explained, 'the creatures, with hunger,' but promised shortly to return. Grania merely nodded. She was sitting, as she had sat all night, close beside the bed, gazing upon her sister with eyes from which even the desire for sleep seemed to be permanently banished.

About seven o'clock Honor herself sank into a doze of exhaustion, and Grania thereupon stole out of the cabin to go and look for little Phelim Daly, and send him for Murdough Blake, or in default of Murdough, for Teige O'Shaughnessy, so as to get one or other of them to go at once to Aranmore, and implore Father Tom for the love of Heaven to come to Inishmaan without delay.

She had hitherto been too absorbed to notice or think about the weather, but now, as she stepped outside the cabin and down the gully, she found that a sudden fog had come on, a dense waving curtain of mist, under which everything in front of her was already submerged. It was a fog that seemed to be coming to them from the Connemara side of the bay, and had evidently only recently reached the island, for the sea to the south of it was quite clear. In the direction in which she was going vast cloud armies, still more or less detached one

from another, were marching steadily onward to the assault. Height over height, fold upon fold, on they came ; clinging to the rocks, following the little indentations of the shore, smothering every object the instant they touched it in a thick, cloying, inextricable embrace. It was curious to see how partial was still this invasion. Here, to the left, the sea was clear, the pale rays of sun lighting up the wash of the waves as they broke over the outlying rocks and skerries ; there, to the right, the bays and cooses were already choked to the very brim. Overhead at one moment she could see a sky, clear, seemingly, to the zenith ; another minute and the thick woolly masses had swept over her, lower and lower still, pouring on and on from their inexhaustible fog cauldrons away to the north and the north-west.

She hastened down the track, and along the lower ridge to the Dalys' cabin ; found the boy and despatched him on his errand, with strict orders not to rest or come back until he had found either Murdough or Teige O'Shaughnessy. Then she returned, to take up her place again beside Honor's bed.

So the day wore on. Molly Muldoon did not return for a long, long time, and she remained therefore quite alone in the cabin. There was hardly any change. Honor continued to doze, and Grania, absorbed in watching her, had almost ceased to notice the passage of time. Suddenly, about three in the afternoon, she was startled by an extraordinarily rapid accession of darkness almost like the coming on of night, a darkness

so great as to make it all but impossible to see across the cabin.

Going to the door and opening it, she found herself facing a solid-looking wall of vapour in which every detail of landscape seemed to be lost. To the south indeed the sea was still visible, but even here the whole surface was covered with a shroud of mist, dense in some places as wool, and curdling momentarily thicker and thicker, as battalion joined battalion, the more scattered ones stretching fleecy arms to one another across the still visible spaces of water. Evidently this was no morning mist, likely to disperse, but a dense sea fog such as now and then in autumn and early spring, rarely at this season, enclosed the islands in its folds, rendering all communication from one to the other well-nigh impossible for days at a time.

Startled, she turned to look towards the larger island, by this time utterly lost to sight. What was to be done? she thought anxiously. How was Father Tom to be brought, and would he ever be persuaded to venture across the sound in such a fog? What too could have delayed Murdough or Teige? Had Phelim failed to find either of them? Surely, if one happened to be away the other would have been at home? Here was another day passing, and that Honor could survive this night also was hardly to be expected.

That the nearness of the end was troubling the sick woman herself was clear, for when Grania got back to the bed Honor's eyes were open and fixed themselves

instantly upon her with a longing expression. Seeing that she wished to speak, Grania stooped and leaned over her. Honor's white lips parted with a great effort.

'Is he coming, allanah!' she muttered breathlessly. 'Auch, Grania dear, don't be delaying! 'Tisn't long I'll be in it now, and you wouldn't let me go without the good words at the last?'

'No, no, Honor; don't think of it. Don't be afraid. He'll come, sure enough. Be easy, dear; he'll come.'

Honor's eyes closed again patiently with a satisfied expression, but Grania's mind was a prey to desperate anxiety. What was to be done? Where could Phelim be? Was no one coming to them? She hurried back to the entrance and stood there, straining her eyes into the fog, her heart wrung with passionate anxiety.

Presently a movement made itself seen in it, and a figure was visible dimly struggling up the track towards her. Her whole soul went out in a prayer that it might be Murdough; surely it must be Murdough? But no, another moment showed that it was not a coat but a petticoat that was moving through the fog. It was only, in fact, the faithful Molly Muldoon come back to take her turn at the nursing. Grania beckoned to her eagerly, and, having explained the situation in a few words, picked up her own petticoat and ran off through the fog in the direction of the old villa. If Murdough Blake was to be found anywhere, it would be there she knew.

CHAPTER III

SHE was out of the cabin and the fog had closed around her almost before the words were uttered. It was like a pall, only a white pall instead of a black one, a pall that seems to get through and through and round and round you, to swathe the limbs, to enfold you to the very skin. Down from the sky in white masses it came, and up from the sea—a new sky, a new sea—the very air appeared to be half solid, air that seemed to choke, yet which was light enough and cool enough as you swallowed it.

Grania, as she sped along the familiar track, seemed hardly to know where she was, so rolled round and isolated from everything and everyone was she by this strange enveloping fleecy stuff. As she went on something, too, seemed to happen to her. It was as if the fog had got between her and everything she had come out to do. She hardly thought now of Father Tom. The sick bed, with the white drawn face and the anxious eyes so near death, watching, always watching the door; the hot race between death and the priest—all this, that had so filled her mind the whole day and the previous night, seemed to melt now and to disappear. A new

set of images had arisen. It was a new goal towards which she seemed to be hurrying, for which she was fighting the fog, to which she was struggling on and on through this blinding whiteness.

More and more as she warmed with the struggle her old self emerged, as a rock emerges which has been temporarily hidden by the waves. The thought of Murdough rose with it. It was Murdough whom she had so often gone along this path to meet; it was Murdough whom she was going to meet now. The old love, the old dumb, unquenchable desire rose in her, as it had so often risen before. The remembrance of that evening in the boat—the one evening of evenings in her life—stood out before her like a vision. With it rose the remembrance of two evenings ago when she had looked up suddenly and seen him standing in the middle of the big thorn clump. In the isolation created by the fog, in the glow of her battling with it, in the stress of her own feelings, he seemed to be already with her, to be beside her, to be touching her; not the everyday indifferent Murdough either; the unsatisfactory, conversational Murdough, the Murdough who got tipsy and mocked at her, the Murdough who was always wanting money, but the real Murdough, the Murdough she had never ceased to believe in; who looked up at her suddenly, and then stretched out his arms to her; who caught her in them and held her; the Murdough who loved her, even as she loved him.

If this Murdough had melted a hundred times when

confronted with the real one, he had at least grown again a hundred times when the other Murdough had removed himself. To Grania's mind—to her inmost feelings—he *was* the real Murdough, ten thousand proofs to the contrary notwithstanding. She had known him, seen him, recognised him twice; once for ten minutes in the boat, again for half a minute the other evening when he called to her upon the rocks, and as for the rest of their time together it was nothing—*gustho*—not to be accounted.

That she was going to see this real Murdough became more and more of a conviction with every step she advanced. The emergency seemed to call him into existence. It was now or never! He must and would be found equal to it, it was impossible to believe otherwise. Her faith grew stronger minute by minute, cried aloud in her ears, and pushed itself more and more strenuously upon her with every yard she advanced.

By the time she reached the villa it had become a certainty. As she came round the last corner and dropped into the little hollow—now a smoke-filled cauldron from which all detail had vanished—she could hear a sound of voices coming up from the invisible depths below. The house itself was completely lost to sight until she all but touched it, when it suddenly emerged, its massive three-cornered front rising white out of the dimness. She went hurriedly up to the door, which stood wide open. To the left lay the sea, half covering the rocks, invisible but audible, a dull grinding

noise rising from time to time, then ceasing altogether. On the other side of the house there were a couple of windows, broken, and patched with dirty bits of paper, but upon this side there were none, and never had been any, only three wide low steps which led up to the door, and which were of granite like the house itself, solid granite steps, the homes of flourishing sea spurreys and saxifrages, springing thickly from a dozen clefts and gaping fissures.

Something of the dignity of the type to which it belonged, and which had survived all vicissitudes, seemed to be stamped upon it to-day. Grania had always felt this dignity vaguely, and even now in her hurry a dim sensation of respect began to creep over her as she came within sight of those solidly-cut granite steps, that low, solidly-carved doorway. It was a tribute to a different order of things, to a different way of life from her own, a feeling increased, no doubt, by old Durane's tales of the bygone glory and grandeur of its owner, but also inherent, born in her race, and not, therefore, easily dissevered from it.

A sudden lull in the tumult of voices showed that her coming had been observed, and the next minute her heart gave a great bound and then seemed to stand still, for Murdough himself came out of the house and stood upon the top of the steps looking down at her.

For the last half-hour her thoughts had been rushing to meet him; she had been mentally throwing her arms round him; merging all their late differences, appealing

to their old love, their old childish affection ; telling him all that she had not been able to find words to say the other evening ; telling him that she knew he would help her now in her great trouble, that he would come with her to Aranmore ; forcing him, in fact, by her urgency to do so. Instead, however, of doing anything of the kind, a sudden feeling of diffidence came over her—a feeling of being there a suppliant, a beggar—of being at a disadvantage, she could not tell how or why. Probably it was something in their mutual attitude which suggested it. She had never in her own person known the feeling of being a suppliant, for in her time there had never been any gentry on Inishmaan, and she and Honor stood quite on the summit of such social altitudes as she was acquainted with. All the same, she did know it instinctively, and it arose without any bidding now. This fine young man standing at ease upon the top of the steps—at his own hall door, as it were—the girl—herself—with her petticoat over her head, appealing from below. Where had she seen those two figures that they seemed so familiar ? She did not know, but it had the effect of changing all her previous thoughts, and bringing quite a new element of confusion into her mind.

Possibly Murdough was similarly affected by the accidental juxtaposition ; in any case, all situations of personal importance came naturally to him, and it was with none of the diffidence he had shown the other evening, on the contrary, with an air quite in accordance

with this imaginary picture, that he asked her, in a tone of astonishment, what upon earth was the matter and what had brought her out in such weather? It was not a fit day for decent people to be out of their houses at all; couldn't she see that for herself?

Grania put her hand suddenly up to her head. A momentary vertigo seemed to assail her; a feeling of confusion, as if everything, herself and Murdough included, had got wrong, and were out of place. What had happened to them both? she wondered.

'Arrah, Murdougheen, don't you know? Didn't the child tell you? Didn't you get the word from Phelim?' she stammered at length.

Murdough looked slightly embarrassed.

'Is it little Phelim Daly you mean?' he asked, in a tone of some hesitation. 'Well, yes, Grania; the child did come to me three hours ago, or maybe something better, I will not deny it. But it was not much I could understand of what he said, not much at all. It is no better than a natural he is, you know, and getting worse, I think, the creature, every day, God help him! His father was here at the time, and he said that it was all *gustho* he was talking, so he did—something about going to the big island to look for a priest. Arrah, my God! as if any man in his senses, or out of them, would think of going to the big island in such weather, no matter if it was for a priest, or for anything else! It was just waiting I was for the fog to clear a bit, and then it was up to your house, Grania, I was going, to

see if there was anything I could do for you. Yes, indeed up to your very own house I was going, so you may believe me. But it would be walking over the cliffs, or into a hole in the rocks, I would be, if I was to try and go there now, so I just waited till it should clear. That was how it was, and no lie at all—ask the boys inside, and they will tell you. Arrah, how in God's name did you get here yourself at all, at all? It was the mad woman you were to come out in such weather. Is it your legs you want to break, or your neck, maybe? There has not been such a fog on Inishmaan not for this seven years back—Moriarty O'Flanagan was just saying so—not for this seven years back and more.'

Grania pushed her hair feverishly off her face, and let the petticoat she wore as a cloak drop from her shoulders. She felt hot and stifled. Murdough's words seemed to be coming to her out of a dream; his very personality, as he stood there, big, solid, and self-satisfied, seemed unreal. In this confusion her thoughts had come back to the one fixed and absolute reality—her errand! That, let what would happen, must be carried out.

'It is dying Honor is, that is what she is doing,' she said, simply. 'And it is a priest she must have before she can die—yes, a priest now, this very minute, Murdough! And if you cannot go with me, it is someone else I must get, for it is not till the fog clears she can wait, for the fog may not clear. God knows, all the long night through, and it is not till the morning she will

last, and she cannot die till she gets the priest, so she cannot. And that is why I have come to you, Murdough, because I do not think you would let my sister Honor die and no priest near her, you would not have the heart. And it is myself will go in the curragh with you to Aranmore, only you must come too, you or someone, for I could not row it all by myself. And as for our not going out in the fog, sure, my God! if we were to be drowned itself, the two of us, isn't that better any day of the week than for her to die and no priest near her—she that is such a real saint, and has always set her heart upon having one at the last? Arrah, 'tis only joking you are, I know; you wouldn't refuse me, Murdough, you couldn't! Haven't we two been always together since the time when we were a pair of little prechauns, no higher than a kish—always together, you and me, always? Sure I wouldn't ask you, God knows, if there wasn't the need—the burning, burning need. Isn't your life dearer to me a hundred times than anyone else's, let alone my own? Arrah! come, then, Murdough, dear, come! Don't let us be wasting any more time. 'Tis *dying*, I tell you, she is—dying fast. My God! who knows but 'tis in the death-grips she is this minute up on the rocks yonder, and not a creature nigh her, only Molly Muldoon, and we two not even started yet!'

Murdough Blake was really to be pitied! He was put in a most unpleasant position, one for which great allowance must be made. To begin with, he was excessively good-natured, a fact which even his most

casual acquaintances knew well, and knew that nothing in the world was easier than to tease or coax him into doing anything that was required—so long as it did not entail too troublesome an effort upon his part. For Grania, too, if she had filled him several times of late with a sense of discomfort, if her claims and her 'queerness' had made her irksome and incomprehensible, he had at least a very old feeling of comradeship, one which went back to the very roots of life and was as strong probably as any feeling he was capable of; which had been strengthened and warmed, too, into fresh energy by her unexpected generosity the day before. To refuse her, therefore, now, when she was so extremely urgent, was a real discomfort to him, a real worry and disturbance. Her will, moreover, was much the stronger of the two, and he experienced, therefore, a distinct physical inclination to yield to it and obey without further question. On the other hand, there was something about this particular task to which she was urging him that was peculiarly daunting and disquieting to his mind, the very thought of which sent cold shivers of discomfort through and through him. Had it been a question of taking out a boat in the middle of a storm, no matter how violent, his manhood would probably have risen to the occasion and he would have gone. He was no coward, certainly no commonplace coward, and it was not, therefore, any prosaic fear of death in itself that held him back. It was something else, something in the look, in the very touch and thought of

this dank, close, unnatural whiteness that deterred, and as it were sickened, him by anticipation. He had a sense of its having come there for no good; of its being the abode and hiding-place of who could tell what ugly, malignant spirits. A whole hoard of ancestral terrors, unexplained but unmistakable, awoke and stirred in his mind as he looked abroad from the steps, and thought of himself out there, adrift and helpless in a boat; lost and smothered up in this horrible white blanket of a fog; a prey to Heaven alone knew who or what! A cold shiver ran through him from head to heels. No, he *could* not, he really *could* not go. Grania must be reasonable. To-morrow, or any time, even in the night, as soon as the fog cleared, he was ready to start. Meanwhile Honor must abstain, for this one evening, from dying, or if she would be so unreasonable as to die just now, well, die she must for once without a priest, for no priest could he, or any man, in his opinion, bring her in such weather. He set himself to put all this clearly before his petitioner. He was really exceedingly vexed to have to refuse her, but plainly there was no help for it.

‘Then, indeed and indeed, Grania, ’tis mortal sorry I am to go against you, so I am,’ he said, scratching his head with a vigorous gesture, less dignified, but probably a good deal more natural, than his previous airs of superiority. ‘And if it was anyway possible—any way possible at all—to get to the big island, it is myself would go with you this minute, yes, indeed, and gladly,

rather than disappoint you. Why not? it would be only a pleasure. But sure, my God! how can I, or any man in this mortal world, go out in such weather? It is not in reason to ask such a thing. Merciful powers! only look at it over there!—thicker and thicker, and queerer and queerer, and more wicked-looking every minute it's getting, curling and gathering itself up into great heaps as if it was a mountain made of smoke—real Hell smoke, it is—yes, indeed, my faith and word—real Hell smoke, no other! God knows that I am not afraid, so you need not think *that*. God who is up there in glory knows whether I am afraid or not—right well He knows it, no one upon this earth better, or as well. But there are some things that it is not right for any man to attempt to do, no, nor be asked to do, either, so there are. Arrah! my faith and word, I wonder you can't see it for yourself. Sure, even if I were to get out the boat to oblige you, how in the name of reason could I find the way to Aranmore in such weather as this? Is it by smelling at it with my nose I would find it? There is no seeing it, no, nor seeing anything else in such unnatural weather, so there is not, no more than if you were looking about you in the middle of a cave in the black inside heart of a mountain. And, if you did get there itself, no priest would come out with you, not one foot of it, so he would not! No, but he would tell you that you had no business to come out at all on such a day, that he would, for there is no knowing what may happen to people if they will do

what they are not meant to do. It is straight up out of the boat in the middle of the bay a man would maybe find himself taken, and carried away God knows where, so he might, for there are things about on a day like this that it doesn't do to speak of, no, nor to think of either, as everyone that is sensible knows right well. And as for Honor dying, sure, what would ail her to die to-night? Isn't it months upon months she has been at it, and why would she choose such weather as this to die in? 'Twouldn't be decent of her, so it wouldn't, and 'tis the decent woman she has always been! Arrah! then, be a good girl, Grania agra, and just go home and stay quietly in the house till to-morrow, and begorrah! by the first streak of day, or sooner, so long as it's anyway decent weather, I'll come to you, and we'll go off for the priest, sure enough, and bring him back with us in the curragh. Won't that content you, Grania, dheelish?—say it will, and go home quickly, there's a good girl, for, indeed, 'tis wickeder and wickeder looking it's getting every minute.'

But Grania's face was set like a flint. She had picked up the petticoat and gathered it about her shoulders again, her whole air showing a determination utterly defiant of all blandishments.

'It is to look for Teige O'Shaughnessy I am going now,' she said briefly. 'And if I do not find him, then I am going to Aranmore by myself, for I will not let my sister Honor die and never a priest near her, so I will not, God help me!'

Murdough felt the natural displeasure of a man who has taken great pains to explain a matter in the clearest possible manner and who finds that all his explanations have been simply thrown away. He was annoyed, too, by the mention of Teige's name.

'Then it is not Teige O'Shaughnessy you will find, for it was over to Allinera he went this morning with his pack, and it is not back he will be able to get home through this fog, the poor *boccach*, I am thinking,' he said contemptuously. 'And as for your going alone to Aranmore in a curragh this night, you will not do *that* either, I am thinking, so you will not. If you do, 'tis the mad woman you are—the mad woman out and out!' And he turned upon his heel to go back into the house.

'Then it is the mad woman I am, sure and certain,' she answered, 'for it *is* going I am, and so good-night to you, Murdough Blake.'

There was a mutual pause. Both had now said all that they had got to say. Both had reached a platform from which there was no receding. Murdough was absolutely determined that, let what would happen, nothing should tempt him to stir abroad upon such an evening. Grania was still more absolutely determined that, come what would, a priest for Honor she must and would get. If Murdough would not help her, then Teige should. If Teige proved to be really from home, then she would go by herself, and find her way across the sound as best she could. If every man in Inishmaan

was afraid of the fog, *she* was not afraid. Honor should not die without a priest. That fact, amongst much that was dim and confused, stood out absolutely fixed and certain.

She turned round resolutely, therefore, to go, and then—and then—she turned back again! She was torn in two. Was this the end? the very, very end? Were they parting like this? That it was no everyday parting, not even any everyday quarrel, of that she felt absolutely certain. Was it, *could* it be the end of all things? No, it couldn't be! she told herself. It was not possible! Again her faith in Murdough—the real, the invisible Murdough, rose—rose, too, in the very teeth of evidence. It was *not* possible, she decided; he was joking, she felt sure of it. She turned, therefore; hesitated; went a few steps onward; then again stopped, and again hesitated.

Suddenly she turned resolutely back with a bound, rushed up the three broad steps of the villa, and stood beside him in the porch on the top of them. It was a tolerably deep porch, and the fog, besides, was now so dense that as they stood there they were to all intents and purposes as isolated as if no other human beings existed in the world. Although there were three men within a very few yards of them, the sense of solitude was for the moment as complete as though they had stood alone together in the centre of the great Sahara. They were encompassed hand and foot by the whiteness; two ghostly figures, cut off and hidden away in a world of

their own—hidden, to a great degree, even from one another. For Grania, certainly, there existed no other creatures at the time save only herself and Murdough. Only herself and Murdough, and they were parting; parting, yet for the moment together, for the moment still within reach, touch, and grasp of one another.

The result was that, almost before he had realised that she had returned and that she was standing beside him, Murdough felt two arms about his neck, clinging tighter, tighter still, pressing about it in a convulsive, panic-stricken embrace, close and clinging as that of the very fog without, only warm, very warm, and very human; desperation in every touch of it, anger, too, but above all love—a love that could kill its object, but that would never fail it; could never entirely cease to believe in it.

‘Och, Murdough! Murdough! Murdough!’ she whispered, and her breath fanned his cheek fiercely. ‘Och, Murdough, look at me! Murdougheen speak to me! Is there never one bit of love for me in all that big strong body of yours? Never one bit of love for your poor Grania, that’s loved you, and none but you, all her life long, ever since she was a little bit of a girsha? Sure, heart of my heart, wouldn’t I die any day in the week gladly just to please you, or any night of it for that matter either, if you asked me? and is there nothing you’d do for me in return—nothing? nothing? Arrah! say you’ll come with me to Aranmore—only say the word—say you’ll not refuse me.

Sure you couldn't, Murdough, you *couldn't*, let me go out alone into the strange wild night without you? Arrah, say you couldn't dear; say it! 'Deed and you needn't say it, for I wouldn't believe it of you, not if anyone swore it, so I wouldn't. Och, *ma slanach!* *ma slanach!* who have I in the wide world to look to but you? My God! 'tis mad, out and out, I think I am going, for my heart feels bursting in the inside of me.'

Murdough was shocked, more than shocked, he was startled, positively scared and terrified by such an unlooked-for demonstration, such utterly unheard-of vehemence. If Grania had gone mad, he certainly had not done so, and one proof of his sanity was that he was intensely conscious of the presence of those two other men gathered round the cracked punch-bowl not far off, as well as of the presence of Shan Daly, who was probably hidden away in some obscure corner of the building. He could not see any of them certainly, and therefore presumably they could not see him. Still they might hear; a thought which filled him with acute discomfort. Had Grania really gone mad, he asked himself; it seemed to be the only possible explanation. Lapses into drunkenness were trifles, a few other obvious slips from the path of absolute rectitude were customary, and therefore forgivable, but such conduct as this was unheard of, was absolutely unprecedented and inconceivable! His sense of decorum was stirred to its very depths.

Rapidly disengaging himself from her he drew her hastily out of the porch, down the steps, and round the nearest corner of the building, where there was a sort of weedy ditch or hollow which ran between the wall of the villa and the bank, ending in a kind of kitchen-midden, made up of all the loose rubbish which had accumulated there from time to time, and beyond which a small, disused back-door opened. Here they again confronted one another.

Either his look of dismay had aroused Grania to a sense of the enormity of her conduct, or the mere break in the chain of her ideas had brought her back to everyday life, in any case she was now blushing hotly. The fiery fit was past. She felt beaten down and subdued by her own vehemence. All she wanted now was to get away—to get away quickly, and to be alone.

‘Then indeed and indeed I don’t know what ails me this evening, so I do not, Murdough,’ she said in a tone of confused apology. ‘’Tis the weather, maybe! God knows, it is the queerest, most unnatural sort ever was and seems to be driving one out of one’s senses.’ She paused; then went on: ‘Maybe ’tis right you are about not going out in it, dear, and I’ll just step back to the house, as you bid me, and, please God, I’ll find Honor something easier, and she’ll hold out till the morning, and if not, why, I must just go look for Teige. Anyway, God won’t desert her, come what will, I’m sure. He couldn’t, could He? He never would have the heart to do such a thing, and she such a real saint!’

She paused again, and looked at him beseechingly, then added timidly, 'Tisn't out and out angry you are with me, dear, are you? Arrah! Murdough, it wasn't me did it at all, at all, you know, only the weather, just the weather and the fear I was in of Honor dying without the good words at the last.'

For the third time she paused, and stood looking at him, trying hard to see his face in the fog. But his face was a mere blur, and he himself remained absolutely silent. This silence was so extraordinary, so unprecedented upon his part, that it filled her with a sense of awe, both of awe and of self-dismay. After waiting a minute, therefore, she added, still more humbly, 'Good-bye, dear. God knows 'tis sorry I am for vexing you. It won't happen again, Murdough—never again, dear; never!' and she turned to go.

For the first time that evening an unaccountable wave of irresolution swept over Murdough. He was very angry with her, excessively angry; ashamed too, and embarrassed to the last degree; nay, he was inclined, as has been said, to think that she really must have gone mad, since no one who was not mad would behave in such a way. All the same, something new seemed to be stirring within him. He, too, felt 'queer.' Could it really be the weather, or, if not, what was it? The effect in any case was that he felt suddenly disinclined to let her go. A sudden wish came over him to stop her, to hear again what she had to say; to quarrel with her perhaps, but not to part with her so suddenly. He

made a step forward. She was still within easy reach, had only gone, in fact, a yard or two up the bank. It was upon the tip of his tongue to call after her, to ask her to stop: to say that, perhaps, after all, he *would* go with her, since she had so set her heart upon it—piece of folly as it was!—that in any case he would go back with her as far as the cabin, and see for himself how Honor was getting on, whether matters were really so desperate as she asserted or not. He had made a couple of steps forward, had opened his lips, his hand was actually outstretched, when out of the dark doorway in the wall behind him another hand suddenly emerged, a lean hand with hairy clutching fingers, the arm belonging to it clad in a sleeve so ragged that it literally fell away from it in filthy, sooty-coloured ribbons. This other hand caught Murdough's and held it fast for a minute. Only for a minute, but when it had again released its hold Grania was already out of reach, half-way up the side of the bank, and nothing was to be seen far or near but the white all-encompassing shroud of the fog.

CHAPTER IV

THAT shroud was whiter and more encompassing than ever as she made her way back to the cabin. Its effect upon her was not, however, now to excite, but to deaden and subdue. The long struggle with Murdough; the failure of her appeal to him; her own, even to herself, unexpected and unaccountable behaviour at the end of their meeting; the dismay with which he had received that behaviour; all these had combined to produce a reaction. She felt thoroughly beaten down now, thoroughly sobered and ashamed. No one on Inishmaan, no girl, possibly anywhere, had ever behaved in such a manner before, no one certainly within the range of her experience had ever been so lost to all propriety and decency. A sense of being a sort of pariah was strong upon her as she crept back with difficulty over the fog-filled fissures, and stole noiselessly into the cabin, wishing only to hide herself there from all eyes. Her new self-mistrust even went so far as to include a belief that her impression about Honor's danger had probably been quite wrong, that she would prove to be no worse than usual, and that it would therefore do per-

fectly well to think about getting the priest for her in the morning when the fog should have dispersed. That, as Murdough said, was the decent thing to do, and no doubt Honor would do whatever was most decent and most proper.

Unfortunately, so valuable a lesson as to the advantages of being always perfectly decent and reasonable was not destined to be enforced that evening. On the contrary, Grania had no sooner opened the cabin-door, and cast her eyes upon the bed, than she saw that a great change for the worse had taken place during her absence. Honor was sitting upright, propped by every movable thing in the house—propped, too, by Molly Muldoon's willing arms—but panting, white, and exhausted, apparently all but gone, so nearly gone, indeed, that it seemed to Grania, as she stood there upon the threshold, that each of these hardly-won breaths must be the last, that the end had positively come. She caught her own breath and sank instinctively upon her knees with a feeling of the imminence of that end.

But Honor had seen her. For a moment a gleam of intense hope lit up her face. She looked behind her eagerly towards the door, expecting evidently to see a black figure following her, that figure for whose coming her whole soul had for hours back been going out in an agony of petition, for whose coming she was struggling so desperately to keep alive. There was no black figure following, however, and after a minute a new look, first of intense disappointment, then of an agonised effort at

submission, came into her face, and she beckoned her sister over to her, speaking in a low gasping whisper.

‘Arrah, Grania child, don’t be destroying yourself . . . breaking the heart in your body with trying to do what you . . . can’t do. Sure ’tis killing yourself I see you are! The fog . . . yes, I know . . . Molly Muldoon told me. Arrah, can’t I see with my own eyes how the house is filled with it . . . in at all the cracks and down the chimney! Saints in glory, ’tis terrible wicked-looking weather, and how could Father Tom come out such an evening if you did get to . . . Aranmore itself?’ She paused, breathless and panting. ‘The Holy Mother will stand between me and . . . and all harm,’ she then whispered painfully. ‘She’ll know it wasn’t my . . . fault. She’ll know ’twas the fog . . . and the men afeard . . . as . . . who could blame them? She’ll speak the word for me . . . I know she will . . . she’ll . . . speak . . . the . . . word for me.’

Again she paused. Suddenly her eyes turned upon Grania.

‘Arrah, my bird, don’t be fretting yourself,’ she murmured tenderly. ‘Don’t I know you would have got him for me if you could?’ Then, with another great effort, ‘Take heart, my bird, take heart; ’tisn’t long I’ll be in it, you know, to be disappointed, and whether or not sure I can bear it, honey sweet; I can bear it, I tell you; bear it . . . easy.’

But a fresh impulse had now seized hold of Grania.

Her momentary apathy was gone. A new determination was setting her eyes ablaze.

‘You *shall* have him, Honor, and he *shall* come to you, if I have to bring him swimming through the water after me, so he shall,’ she exclaimed fiercely. ‘Don’t be afraid, dear ; keep up your poor heart a little, a very little longer, sister darling, and he’ll be with you.’

She kissed her hastily, and dashed out of the door again, turning this time in the direction of the O’Shaughnessys’ cabin. Maybe Teige would be back, after all. Most probably, almost certainly, he would be back by this time. Anyhow, with Teige or without Teige, to Aranmore and to Father Tom that night somehow or other she would get.

CHAPTER V

SHE hurried desperately on over the flagging, heedless of the cracks, but keeping always upon the same level which must in time, she knew, bring her to the shore exactly opposite the O'Shaughnessys' cabin. The fog was too thick now to dream of keeping to any path, but the levels on Inishmaan are always the same, so that by following any one of them you are sure to reach a given point sooner or later. From time to time she came to some unusually wide fissure, and had to scramble across as best she could, the edges feeling like ice under her feet, or like some sort of half melted substance, such as wax or spermaceti. The short thick thorn-bushes growing out of the rocks brushed her ankles, and now and then she found herself suddenly out upon the cliff-like edge of the step, and had to work her way back to where the terrace broadened and the walking was comparatively safe.

At last she knew by the general look and touch of the rocks that she must be getting close to the narrow tongue of land which led to the smaller islet. This was the most dangerous part of the way, and she stood still

a moment, therefore, to make sure of her bearings, before clambering down to the shore and thence on to the tongue of land.

The fog was absolutely impervious now. It was impossible to see more than a few inches ahead. Every now and then a puff of wind would come and partially clear it for a moment, when the whirling vapour would give her the sense of being surrounded by smoke, so wildly did it fly around her. Then all would close up again, and a sense of suffocation encompass her, through which colder breaths blew fitfully, coming from where rain pools lay amongst the rocks, or where some draught, caught from the sea and entangled in the surf, rose to the upper levels.

Making her way cautiously to the edge of the step, she let herself drop on to the next below. She was now upon the second of the eight steps or platforms of which Inishmaan consists, and there was therefore only one more between her and high-water mark. This one, however, was much more broken and littered with fallen blocks than the upper ones, so that it took her a long time to cross it and longer still to make sure of where she was. At last she got to the edge, and having scrambled down, not without several slips, from not knowing where to set her feet, she reached the bottom, and was thus upon the actual shore at last.

The tide, she calculated, was by this time half-way in, so that it was necessary to make haste in order to secure Teige, and bring him back to where the curragh

was kept. The tongue of rock, at all times narrow and slippery, was to-day all but impassable. Twice she fell, and found herself clinging by her hands to the weed-covered top, her feet and nearly her whole body dangling over the edge, where there was no foothold whatever, and where she could just discern the hungry greenish swell rising noiselessly up, up, up, rising stealthily, as if determined to catch her unawares.

Almost upon hands and knees she succeeded in reaching the other side, and clambered up the final bit of track which led to the cabin. It was so squat and so low that had the island been much larger it would have been easy to miss it altogether. As she came near it looked more like some shaggy old beast crouched there in the hollow than a house. No light showed upon the side facing her, but when she reached the door she could see a pale pink splinter, evidently of firelight, stealing out from below. She knocked twice loudly, her heart beating; hoping, praying that Teige himself would come to the door and open to her. No one came near the door, however, although she could hear someone moving to and fro inside, someone who was evidently quite unaware of that clamorous appeal so close at hand. Grania's heart sank, for it was clear now that Teige was still from home, and only deaf-and-dumb Biddy left in charge, who would not only be utterly useless herself, but would probably not even be able to tell her where Teige was likely to be found.

She lifted the latch of the door. It opened easily,

and she went in. The old woman had her back turned, and did not therefore at first perceive her entrance. It was fairly clear inside, showing that the door had not been opened since the fog had grown so thick. Grania stood for a moment upon the threshold, blinking at the firelight, which seemed painfully hot and red after that unnatural white world she had left outside.

Biddy, dressed as usual from head to heels in red flannel, and still utterly unconscious of anyone's entrance, seemed to be engaged in chasing something or somebody round the cabin, uttering queer, inarticulate cries under her breath as she did so. Now she would make a dart at some object, seated apparently on a beam above the hearth, next, seizing the corner of her petticoat, she would turn and flap vigorously behind her, as if she were being followed and pulled by someone at once very small and very persistent, giving utterance as she did so to scolding or remonstrating sounds, such as a nurse might use to some unusually troublesome child.

So odd was the old creature's behaviour, so utterly unexplained by anything in sight—for not even a cat or a chicken was in the cabin—that Grania, for all her haste, stood still a moment, staring at her as she hopped from side to side of the narrow space. She had seen Biddy behave queerly before, but never quite so queerly as this. Suddenly her reputed powers of seeing and holding communication with the *sidh* came into her mind, and a chill sensation shot over her. Was there *really* something in the cabin that she could not

see? And if so, whereabouts was it, and what was it like? Biddy, meanwhile, in one of her turnings, had caught sight of her visitor standing ghost-like by the door, and uttered a sudden scream, the odd, discordant, hardly-human scream of the deaf and dumb. Grania thereupon stepped forward to explain her errand, the old woman, after a moment's stare of unrecognition, beginning to nod and duck as she perceived who her visitor was. The girl looked hastily round for something of Teige's so as to explain whom she was in search of. She could see nothing but a battered high hat hanging to a hook in the wall which had formerly belonged to dumb Denny, but which his nephew sometimes wore when he went to Aranmore to chapel. This hat she took down, and held towards the old woman with an interrogative gesture, pointing at the same time towards the door.

Whether she was understood or not it was not easy to tell. In any case, Biddy's information was not of any very detailed or available character. Dropping down upon the stool which stood beside the hearth, and throwing her withered arms over her head, she uttered a wild cry, something between a croak and a scream, which was intended to mean 'Gone! Gone!' an ejaculation she had often made use of since her brother died, and which apparently conveyed to her mind all that sense of departure, of loneliness and of desertion which we articulate people employ so many, and often such inadequate, words to convey.

Evidently it was useless to hope for further information, so Grania turned to go. Upon opening the door a solid, white wall of fog rose in front of her, one in which every detail was lost, and which it needed some little resolution to penetrate, so opaque and impervious looking was it. Turning for an instant before the fog again swallowed her up, she saw that old Biddy had already forgotten her visit. With eyes fixed upon a spot a little way above her head, she had risen from her stool and was stealthily approaching that spot, evidently with the intention of pouncing upon whoever was seated there before he or she could hope to perceive her approach and make off. Against the dim background of the cabin the single red fantastic figure lit by the fire-light made a curiously vivid dot of colour, which seemed to hang for several minutes before Grania's eyes as she pursued her way across the fog-filled fissures.

CHAPTER VI

THE disappointment had no effect whatever upon her determination of somehow or other getting to Father Tom that night. There was no one else upon Inishmaan whom she could appeal to with any hope of success, and therefore she did not think of appealing to anyone else. She would go by herself, and she would go at once. Her course was now at least a simple one.

She had to return in the first instance to their own cabin to get out a pair of old oars which hung in the cow-house, but she did not intend to see Honor again, certainly not to let Honor see her. The bare thought of, for a second time that evening, meeting the look of mute dismay which had met her after her first unsuccessful quest went through her like a knife. Anything would be better, she felt, than to see that again; anything, anything.

She stole accordingly to the cow-house like a thief, and, having got down the oars, started again for the landing-place. Moonyeen turned her spotted head and lowed reproachfully, which brought her back at once to see if there was enough for her to eat, and she hastily

shook down a couple of armfuls of weedy grass, cut a few days before in the clefts, and left it near her. That would do till the morning. It was all the cut grass she had by her. To-morrow she must not forget to go and cut some more, she reflected as she did so.

For the second time she had got as far as the old boulder, and for the second time she paused and looked back. Though only a few yards away the cabin was already invisible; the fog making it a mere blur, like some phantom cabin seen in a dream. A sudden intense yearning came over Grania to see the inside of it once again, and a yet greater yearning for one, only one more sight of Honor's face. She *must* see that, she felt; she could not and would not go out into that big hungry sea—to disappear, perhaps, and be lost for ever by herself in the fog—without at least once again peeping at Honor as she slept.

She stole back accordingly and looked in. Molly Muldoon, crouched up into a shapeless blue heap by the bed, was already nodding drowsily, a few inches of puckered forehead, the top of a religiously white cap, the only portions of her distinguishable. Whether Honor slept or not it was impossible to say. Her eyelids were down, and the white face below them might have been a dead woman's face. There was a slight heaving under the sheet, that was all.

Grania stood there and gazed. Her eyes seemed rooted to that narrow square of brown wall and that white face in the dimmest corner of it. Both belonged

to her as nothing else in this whole wide world belonged or ever could belong. She must not delay, however, she knew. Time was slipping on ; what little light was left was rapidly going. She stole out noiselessly, and the cabin-door shut remorselessly behind her. Reaching the big boulder, she again picked up the oars which she had left there, laid them across her shoulders, and turned hurriedly down the track.

It was easy enough to find the way as long as she was in the gully, for there was no turning there to the right or to the left. Beyond it, however, everything—track, rocks, and fog-filled air—looked exactly alike. The oars too prevented her feeling her way as before with her hands, and it was not for a long time and until after many stumbles that she at last reached the small semicircular sweep of sand upon which the curragh was kept.

Just as she did so something bounced suddenly against her foot, making her start violently and spring backwards. She had once or twice heard an odd pattering noise behind her on her way downhill, but everything seemed odd and unaccountable that evening, so that she had given no particular heed to it. Now she looked down panic-stricken, a prey to terror, all the fears awakened by Biddy O'Shaughnessy's proceedings astir again, and leaping within her. It was not until she had dropped one of the oars, and that a violent mew of pain had come up from the ground at her feet, that she discovered that the object was nothing more

terrifying than their own yellow cat. What had induced the creature, which never by any chance left the cabin, which had never followed her in its life, or shown her the smallest sign of affection, which was notoriously a mere mass of greed and self-indulgence, to select that particular evening for following her all this way, coming down to the shore, which, like most of its race, it detested, is not easy to explain. Grania, at all events, made no attempt to explain it. She stooped hastily to pick up the oar, and as she did so stroked the creature's back, a vague feeling of comfort coming to her from its presence. Her solitude did not seem to be quite so solitary now that something belonging to them was with her, even if it was only their own ill-tempered yellow cat. There was no response to her caress beyond that the cat did not, as usual, show any inclination to scratch in return, merely sidled noiselessly past her, and then ran a few paces ahead, its brilliant tail lifted high in air as if to show the way.

As the event proved, Grania was destined to have another, if not a much more efficient, auxiliary. When she had found the curragh, a matter which, small as the space was, took her some time, she began at once to push it towards the sea. A ridge of sand or upsticking point of rock just in front caught it and delayed her, and she went forward to try and clear it away. She was bending down upon her hands and knees, trying to find out its exact position and size, when as she raised her face she suddenly found herself confronted with

another face nearly upon the same level as her own—a ghostly face, with great, widely-staring eyes—gazing straight at her through a foot or two of fog.

Again her fears sprang up, and again they were allayed, this time as the familiar small features and big pale blue eyes of little Phelim Daly gradually became defined, the boy sidling silently up to her as if for protection, and then, like the cat, trotting silently on a step or two in advance, and turning round as though to watch whether she were following.

She asked him what had happened? Where he had been all day? Why, when Murdough wouldn't come, he hadn't tried to find Teige? What his father had done to him? Whether he had beaten him; and how in the end he had managed to escape and to find her out? He made no answer, however, to any of these questions, beyond turning and again fixing his strange blue eyes upon her with a wistful, far-away look; a look full of doubt; one which seemed to ask her in his turn what was the matter; what they were both doing down there upon such a night; why they were out at all; what it all meant? It was an even less responsible, and more far-away look than his usually were, and seemed to suggest that something had happened in the course of the day yet further to disturb and unsettle his always more or less distraught wits.

There was no time to press the matter, and she turned, therefore, to renew her efforts to get the boat to sea, going behind it and pushing as hard as she could.

Suddenly the impediment, whatever it was, gave way ; the curragh slid rapidly forward ; its black bow splashed into the invisible water. Another push from behind, and it was afloat.

While she was still pushing it, before it was yet wholly afloat, and before she had even made up her mind whether she was going to take Phelim with her or not, the yellow cat had run on ahead, and had sprung into the boat with an air of decision. This seemed to settle the matter, and they all got in together ; an odd boatload surely ! At the very last moment one of the crew, however, changed its mind. Perhaps it was Phelim's presence, for whom it had always shown a particular aversion ; perhaps it was the rocking of the boat as Grania pushed her oar against the sand. Anyhow, with a sudden demoniac mew of fury, the yellow cat sprang up again ; darted frantically, like a thing possessed, from side to side, up and down the thwarts, one after the other ; then up the stern, availing itself of Phelim, who sat there, as a bridge, and scratching his bare legs viciously as it did so, sprang to the shore again and raced frantically away up the spit of sand, its yellow tail flaring for a second like a small meteor before it vanished into the darkness.

Phelim uttered a cry of dismay, and sprang up as if he also were about to escape. Grania, however, called to him to stay still ; then, as the only use she could put him to, desired him to go to the other end of the boat and look out carefully, and if he saw anything

ahead of them, no matter what, except water and fog, to call to her at once.

Apparently he understood, for he nodded twice, going over and squatting down in his usual frog-like fashion at the bow, holding on there to the two sides, as he peered into the foot or so of air and water, which was all that was visible ahead of them. She meanwhile had settled steadily down to the task of rowing. It was exactly like trying to row blindfold, but she knew so well every inch of the way, every rock, shoal, and sandbank, and had so often gone along it in the dark, as well as the light, that it seemed hardly possible to her that she could go far wrong.

The first notice from her watcher at the bow came, however, before they had even got clear of their own island. She thought she was upon the usual track, quite away from the dangerous rocks of Portacurra, the furthestmost point to westward—that she was even allowing more space than was usual or necessary—when all at once a cry from Phelim startled her, and she stopped rowing.

Looking behind she at first saw nothing but the black beak-like bow of the boat, and the boy's figure huddled beside it, everything else being a mere blur, but as far as she could make out clear. She thought that he had simply made a mistake, but with another long-drawn cry he turned and pointed downwards towards the water. Leaning forward and looking closer, she then saw, to her surprise, that it was quite true.

Greenish points were rising dimly in every direction, some of them within an inch or two of the surface, and beyond these again were other and larger masses, formless as the very fog itself, but which could be nothing but rocks, the barnacle-coated knife-edged rocks of Portacurra, a touch from one of which would tear a hole in the curragh's canvas sides and sink it like a stone.

Backing cautiously, she managed to escape without any contact. Only just in time, however; another stroke of the oars, two seconds' more delay, and Phelim's warning would have come too late.

They were now out in Gregory's Sound, and the only serious danger therefore was of missing the great island altogether, and rowing straight away into the Atlantic.

After so bad a start Grania had lost confidence in her own powers of finding the way. There was nothing to be done, however, but to row steadily on, and, above all, to avoid turning the boat round. She shut her eyes accordingly, as the safest way of avoiding this, and rowed her hardest, every muscle in her body bound and strung to the task. If she missed the right way past Illaunalee, over the bar and so into Killeany Bay, she was resolved to run ashore anywhere, no matter where, and, leaving the curragh to its fate, push on with Phelim to Father Tom's house, and trust to getting the loan of another curragh to bring them back to Inishmaan.

Half an hour passed thus, and then an hour. Over-

head, the white curtain was thicker than ever ; yet it seemed to her that it was a little lighter now than it had been when they were starting, showing that it was less the time of day than the sheer density of the fog that had made it so impossible to see upon their own island. On and on she rowed ; still on and on, always on and on. Already it appeared to her that she had been rowing quite long enough to have crossed Gregory's Sound, here little more than a mile wide, and she hoped, therefore, that she had got upon the right track, and would soon be passing the straggling line of sandbanks which surround Illaunalee. Odd-looking vortexes and currents were visible now in the dimness overhead ; mysterious maelstroms, gazing up, instead of down, into which the careering fragments might be seen circling round and round ; breaking capriciously off, joining together again, gathering into interlaced patterns, sweeping up and down, expanding, converging ; all this movement going on along the edge of a sort of pit, scooped as it were out of the very air itself. Suddenly, while she was looking at it, the whole thing would close up, and a new vortex or funnel break out in an altogether different place.

Grania was beginning to get drowsy over her task, what with the weight of the air and with the pressure of her own troubled thoughts. Her drowsiness did not perceptibly slacken the activity of her muscles, but she rowed more and more mechanically, the rhythm of her own movements seeming to produce a dream-like effect upon her brain. Thoughts, or rather dreams, of Honor

visited her from time to time, thoughts, too, or dreams, of Murdough, both equally broken, confused, fragmentary. As far as her own sensations went, she might have been rowing there the whole livelong night, so benumbing and sleep-like was that torpor. How long she really had been rowing she could not in the least have told, but her thoughts or her dreams were suddenly cut short—cut into as it were—by another wild cry from Phelim. This time it was much more than a cry, it was an actual scream; a shrill, discordant screech, such as some animals give when they are in the intensest throes of terror. Grania on her side started violently and turned round. The boy, she found, had leaped up from his seat, and was standing at his full height, waving his thin arms frantically in the air, calling to her, and pointing directly above his head, with gesticulations violent enough to all but swamp the frail craft they were in. Another moment and it seemed as if he would leap clean overboard from sheer panic.

Looking up she, too, saw what he had seen, and was almost equally startled. Apparently immediately above them, in reality a little way ahead, one of those same aerial funnels had just opened, and within the comparatively clear space of its air-filled hollow could be seen, not merely the careering particles of fog circling round and round, but something else, something that did not circle or move at all, a few inches of wind-tattered grass, a few inches more of bare splintered rock. There they hung, apparently in mid-air, their begin-

nings and endings alike invisible, but this much clearly discernible, a startling vision in itself, and a plain proof, moreover, that they were not approaching Illaunalee, or anywhere even remotely near it.

Where were they? Grania asked herself in dismay. Were they moving along the base of the south side of Aranmore, where the cliffs rise constantly higher till they are crowned at last by Dun Aengus, or had she passed the mouth of Killeany Bay altogether, and were they edging therefore along the lower and more broken cliffs upon the north side of the island? She did not know; she could not even remotely guess!

In any case the only thing to be done was to get away once more into open water, and with a rapid movement of the oars she accordingly backed the curragh, forgetting for the moment little Phelim, who, staggering helplessly, fell violently forward, only just saving himself by clutching with both hands at the side of the boat, where he hung for a while, head downwards, doubled in two, his shoulders and the front part of his body all but touching the water.

It seemed to be the last straw needed to upset his already shattered nerves and panic-stricken wits! From that moment he evidently gave himself up for lost. Gathering himself back by degrees to his former place he began to whimper and cry aloud, rubbing his hands up and down his poor starved legs, moaning over their bruises and talking rapidly and incoherently, now to himself, now to the sea, or to the planks in front of him. Once in

the middle of these moanings and mutterings he suddenly looked up and uttered another prolonged screech of terror, whereupon Grania stopped abruptly in her rowing and looked round. This time, however, he had screamed at nothing. He was incapable, in fact, of serving any longer as watcher. Reality and unreality had become one to him. Like some utterly fear-maddened animal he continued to moan and whimper helplessly, gazing out into the fog-filled space in front of him, but not seeing anything, even if there happened to be anything there to see; his big, prominent blue eyes staring blankly, and as blind eyes stare, over the edge of the curragh as it floated on and on, under the invisible but always near presence of the great cliffs; on and on; yes, but where to? to what goal? towards what sort of a landing-place? Neither of them knew; she very little more than he.

CHAPTER VII

FOR Grania had by this time utterly lost count of her bearings. To hinder the curragh from turning round, to hinder it from running upon the rocks, and so getting immediately swamped, was all that she could attempt to do. She paddled along slowly, therefore, trying from time to time to make out where she was, but always, as she knew, failing utterly; failing to the point of not even knowing whether she was at that moment facing the mouth of Killeany Bay or turning her back upon it.

That last point soon decided itself, for the cliffs were evidently getting steeper. Despite, too, the dead calm, unruffled by even so much as a breath, despite the leaden shroud which pressed down everywhere upon the water, low thuds made themselves audible from time to time, as the slow, sulky swell rolled into the shore, impeded, apparently, by the thick, lifeless air, yet reaching it in the end, and sinking down in a succession of slow, monotonous washes. From the general look of the water around, it began to be clear to Grania that they must by this time have got amongst some of the outlying reefs, for there were rocks now to right of

them, as well as to left. The tide, too, was running swiftly, and kept drawing them insensibly shorewards. Twice she caught a glimpse of a pale green monster only just in time to avoid running full upon it. Ought she to go on, or ought she to stop? Ought she to try to turn round? or what ought she to do? she asked herself.

The question was soon settled. Suddenly, without the slightest warning from Phelim, without a hint of any kind from without, there came a startling crash. Another and another followed. Then came a worse sound, the sickening sound of ripping and tearing; the sharp ripping of tarred canvas. This time they were full upon a rock, which had pierced them through and through, as a pin might pierce a child's balloon. In another moment, it is true, they were afloat again, but it was too late. Water was now pouring in wildly through a hole in the side. Already the bottom of the boat was half full. In the first impulse of the moment Grania had snatched up her flannel petticoat and stuffed it into the hole, holding it there with both hands as she felt the pressure growing greater and greater. It was like trying, however, to stop the course of a river—hopeless to absurdity. To get out somewhere, no matter where; to reach the shore if possible; if not, to reach some rock; to get the boy, at any rate, out, was the only thing to be attempted.

She looked wildly round, straining her eyes distractedly through the impenetrable, blinding whiteness.

Presently another pale green monster loomed slowly up —part of the same rock, possibly, they had already struck upon, possibly of another. In any case it was flat on the top, and fairly easy, apparently, to scramble on to; rose, too, as far as she could make out, above the high-water line; nay, might even be joined by other rocks to the base of the cliffs. It was a hopeless-looking chance of escape, still it was the only one that offered itself, and accordingly she drove the boat full against the side of the rock, calling out loudly as she did so to Phelim to jump out and climb up it.

Roused by her tone of command the boy obeyed, apparently without knowing why, clambered over the side of the boat, caught at the rock, clutching hold of the sea-weed which fringed it, and hanging there for a minute or two as a small sloth might hang to the bough of a tree. At the same moment the other end of the curragh, already half full of water, was jerked lower still by the movement, and the displacement, slight as it was, of his weight, and sank deeply in the sea, and in so doing was pushed several feet farther from the rock.

Seeing the boy clear, and knowing that in another few minutes the boat must in any case fill, Grania took her hands away from the hole, through which the water instantly spurted upwards in a solid gush. Summoning all her strength, she, too, made a great effort to try and attain the rock, upon the side of which Phelim was now crouched, but the already nearly submerged curragh gave her a poor foothold to spring from, and she missed it

by a foot or more, and sank immediately into deep water.

The tide was running fast; there was no other landing-place of any kind; nothing to climb upon; nothing to catch hold of. There were rocks in plenty around her, but they were most of them inches deep in water, a stray, glimmering, point appearing from time to time, like a ghost, and then vanishing again. She was caught, too, like a straw in the grip of that slow, seemingly gentle swell, which swept her hither and thither, now a little nearer to the rock, now impossibly, hopelessly, far away from it again. Clearly unless help came the end would not be very long delayed.

Roused by the splash and by the sharp ringing cry she had uttered as she fell, Phelim half turned round, then climbed a little higher up, helping himself by the sea-weeds, until he reached the top, which was quite grey and dry. Here, getting upon his hands and knees, he stared down into the waste of water below him, and at the struggle going on within it. He was evidently incapable of anything further, however. Mind and body were alike paralysed—alike unable to respond to any call from without. He scarcely seemed to know what was occurring, retaining only by sheer unreasoning instinct his grip upon the foothold he had secured. What dim ideas travelled through his brain as he lay crouching there it is impossible to say, but as far as help went, any of the gulls swooping overhead, any of the sea-weed-covered spider-legged crabs scuttling in and

out of the crannies below him, were of as much avail as he.

Either Grania knew this or she may have even forgotten his presence, for she made no effort to induce him to come to her aid. She was too young, however, and too vigorous, to surrender the contest without at least a struggle for her life. Twice she neared the rock, striking out bravely through the water, though she was unable to swim, and twice the current pulled her back again, sweeping her farther and farther towards the open sea, but so lightly, so buoyantly, as it were playfully, toying capriciously with her as a child or a young animal plays with something that it has taken a fancy to. It was an unequal game though. Her strength was going fast, the water was very cold, although the night was warm. Five minutes more, nay three, nay two, and the struggle would be at an end.

Huddled like a frog, his knees and chin almost touching each other, Phelim Daly lay upon the rock and watched her dully, sick, despairing apathy written upon every line of his small white face, his big, always unnaturally prominent, eyes staring down with hardly a trace of comprehension or intelligence in them. Again Grania struggled forward, and again the capricious water washed her a trifle nearer to the rock, and to comparative safety—washed her once almost within touch of it. Her face, with its clinging masses of black hair, had grown very white now, nearly as white as that of the boy gazing vacantly down at her from only a few

feet above her head. With a sudden effort, a sudden concentration of despair and of hopelessness, she again uttered a cry for help; a wild, ringing cry which rang out far and wide through the silence, away out into the big, lonely Atlantic, flinging her hands at the same time over her head, her straining eyes gazing round and round with the agonising, longing stare of desperation. Was no one coming to her help, then? No one? *no one?*

‘Murdough!’ she cried. Then, after a pause, ‘Murdough . . . ’tis drowning I am! For God’s sake, come to me! Murdough! Murdough!’

But there was no Murdough. There was no response of any sort, no help or hint or suggestion of help. There was only the swaying water; only the dimly-seen foam-streaked surface; only the white, closely-enveloping shroud of fog; only Phelim’s small face peering helplessly over the rock; so few feet away in reality, such miles and miles for any practical purpose.

The tide was running out now, and it took her along with it, but so slowly, so insensibly, that it was the faintest, most barely perceptible movement. The silence everywhere was extraordinary. The sea under its close-fitting shroud seemed as absolutely unruffled as the basin of some indoors fountain. Not a ripple anywhere; only that same slow internal movement, a movement hardly to be perceived upon the surface; only the gradual undertow of the tide drawing everything stealthily in one direction. Sea, sky, land, water,

everything seemed alike to be lapped in the drowsiest, the most complete and immovable repose. Sleep seemed everywhere to be the order of the hour, to have taken possession of all things. The very atoms of seaweed as they floated along appeared to partake and be half conscious of that placidity.

Grania had ceased now to struggle. She was sinking slowly, but she still kept her head partially above the surface. Had there been the slightest movement in the water all would have been over before this, but, as it was, death, too, seemed to linger, to share in the general suspension of all things, to delay and hover. Suddenly a quantity of brown sea-weed, stirred by the changing tide, swept round the corner of the big rock and floated down towards her. It was a mass of enormously long laminaria, grown, not within tide-marks, but out in the deeper, more abysmal region, as leathery in texture, as solid, and seemingly as sustaining as the branch of a forest tree, the thick strands welded together by years of growth in deep water. It floated up to her, then under her, half lifting her upon itself as upon a raft, her hands clutching in the thick oily strands, her whole body sustained and for the moment uplifted by it.

With this feeling of support from below a new look came into her face; her eyes opened widely, and she suddenly stretched out her hands.

‘Augh, Murdough! Murdough!’ she murmured deliriously. ‘Didn’t I know you’d come? Didn’t I

know you'd never leave your poor Grania to drown by herself in the cruel salt sea? Arrah, take me up, then, darling, take me up! Be quick, dear, and gather me up out of this cold, creeping water! Augh, but 'tis the strong arms you have, though you would always have it 'twas me was the strongest, you rogue! Hold me closer to you, Murdough dear; hold me closer, I say; closer! closer still! Augh, Murdough! . . . *Murdougheen!*'

And with a movement as if Murdough Blake had indeed come at last to the rescue, and was lifting her in his arms, she let her head fall back upon the sea-weed, her cheek resting upon it as if upon his shoulder, her eyes at the same time closing with a long-drawn sigh of satisfaction, and so resting and so sighing she sank slowly, insensibly, and without a struggle into the great folds of the laminaria, which, after supporting her in that position for perhaps a minute, began gently to loosen its long sashlike strands, floating presently away by degrees over the hardly undulating surface, returning again and again, and sweeping back, though in a less compact mass, now under, now over, now round her, the great brown ribbons swaying in easy serpentine curves about the floating form, the two getting to be hardly distinguishable in the all-pervading dreaminess, a dreaminess of which the very fog itself seemed to be but a part; a dream too deep and apparently too satisfactory to be ever again disturbed or broken in upon by anything from without.

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Six or seven hours later the first fishermen astir upon Aranmore, chancing to go out upon the cliff, saw little Phelim Daly still crouched upon the same rock; still staring down with the same terrified, widely-opened eyes into the waste of waters below him. He was promptly rescued, and carried to the nearest cabin, where, when his wits had partially thawed, his errand was either extracted from him, or possibly was guessed without being extracted; in any case, Father Tom was shortly afterwards summoned, and within an hour was on his way to Inishmaan, through the still thick, but by this time penetrable fog, to visit the dying woman.

He was in time. Honor was still alive and perfectly conscious of his coming. Her sunken eyes lit with delight, and her hands clasped one another rapturously as the black figure entered the cabin-door. She looked eagerly behind it for Grania, having been told by old Molly that she had gone herself to Aranmore to fetch him, but when it was explained to her that Grania had stopped to rest at Kilronan she was satisfied, and asked no more. Once again she looked round the cabin questioningly, evidently perplexed and disappointed, when the preparations had all been made, and everything was ready for the last rites, and still there was no Grania to share them with her. That the sister who had never left her, never once in all those weary days and nights, should have left her now; should have deserted her in this extremity; left her to pass alone

through the last dark gate, without her hand to hold by, her face to look to, her shoulder to lean on, must have seemed very strange to her—very strange, no doubt, and very unaccountable. She did not utter any complaints about it, however. She had been too patient all her life to be impatient now. If it was mysterious, why, everything else for that matter was mysterious too. The Familiar was receding, the Unfamiliar approaching fast, coming nearer and nearer every moment. After her long probation, after her tedious waiting, she was at last upon the verge of that looked-for, that intensely-desired country; a country which, if to most of us it seems but a dream within a dream, a floating mirage, a phantom made up of love and faith, of hope and of yearning desire—unthinkable, untenable, all but impossible—was to Honor, and is to such as Honor, no phantom, no mirage, but the soberest and solidest of solid realities; the thing for which they live, the hope for which they die. Real or unreal, fact or fancy, it was coming rapidly towards her now. She was floating towards it as fast as ever she could float; hurrying breathlessly, as a stream hurries when it nears the sea. Long before the fog had completely melted away, long before ordinary matter-of-fact daylight had returned to Inishmaan, her journey thither was accomplished. Already, even while the priest stood beside her, while the prayers she had so longed for, those prayers which Grania had died to obtain for her, were being uttered,

she was drifting across its borderland ; already its sounds rather than his voice, rather than any earthly voices, were in her ears ; already her foot was upon its threshold. And upon that threshold, perhaps—who knows ?—who can tell ?—they met.

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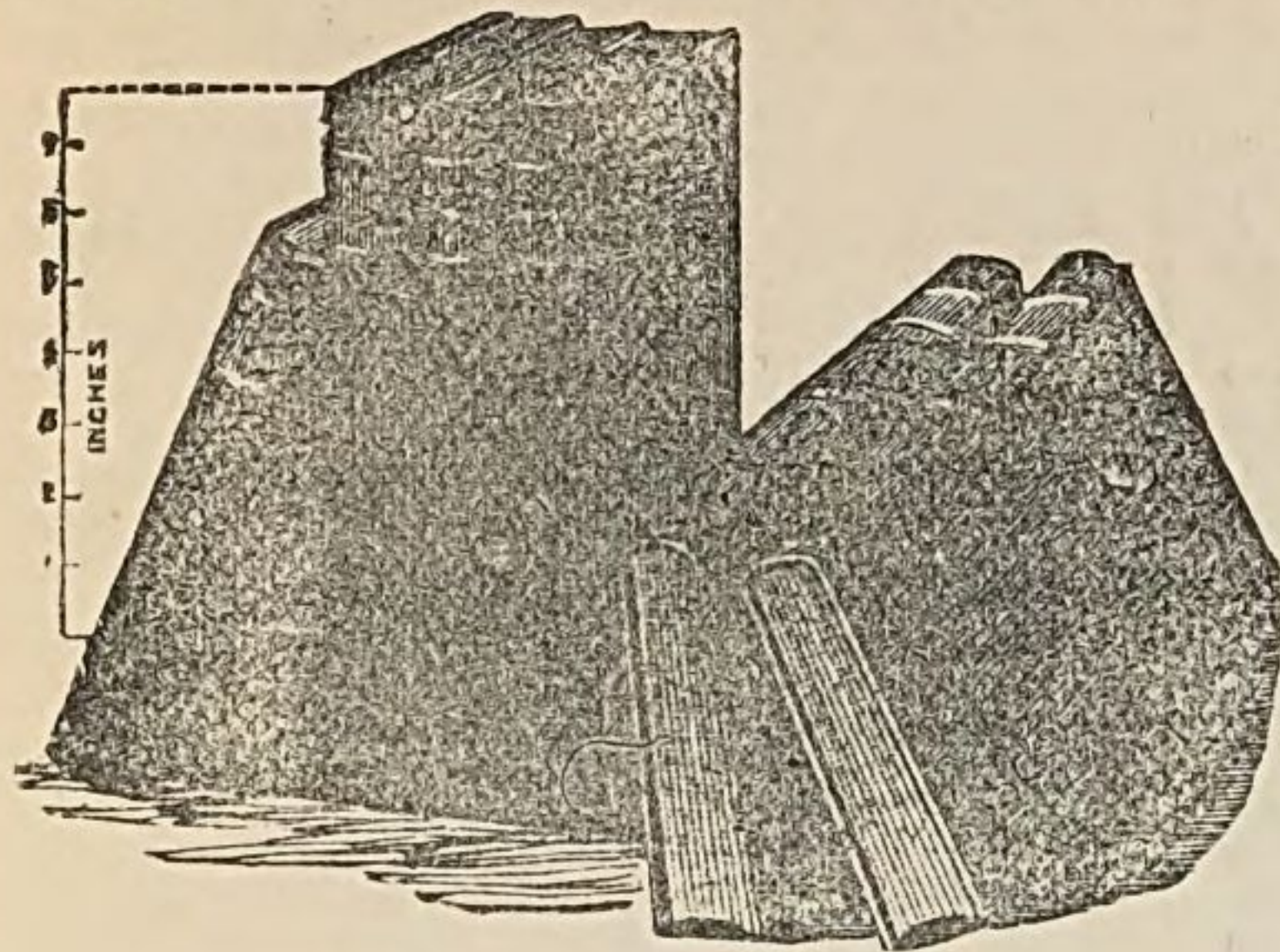
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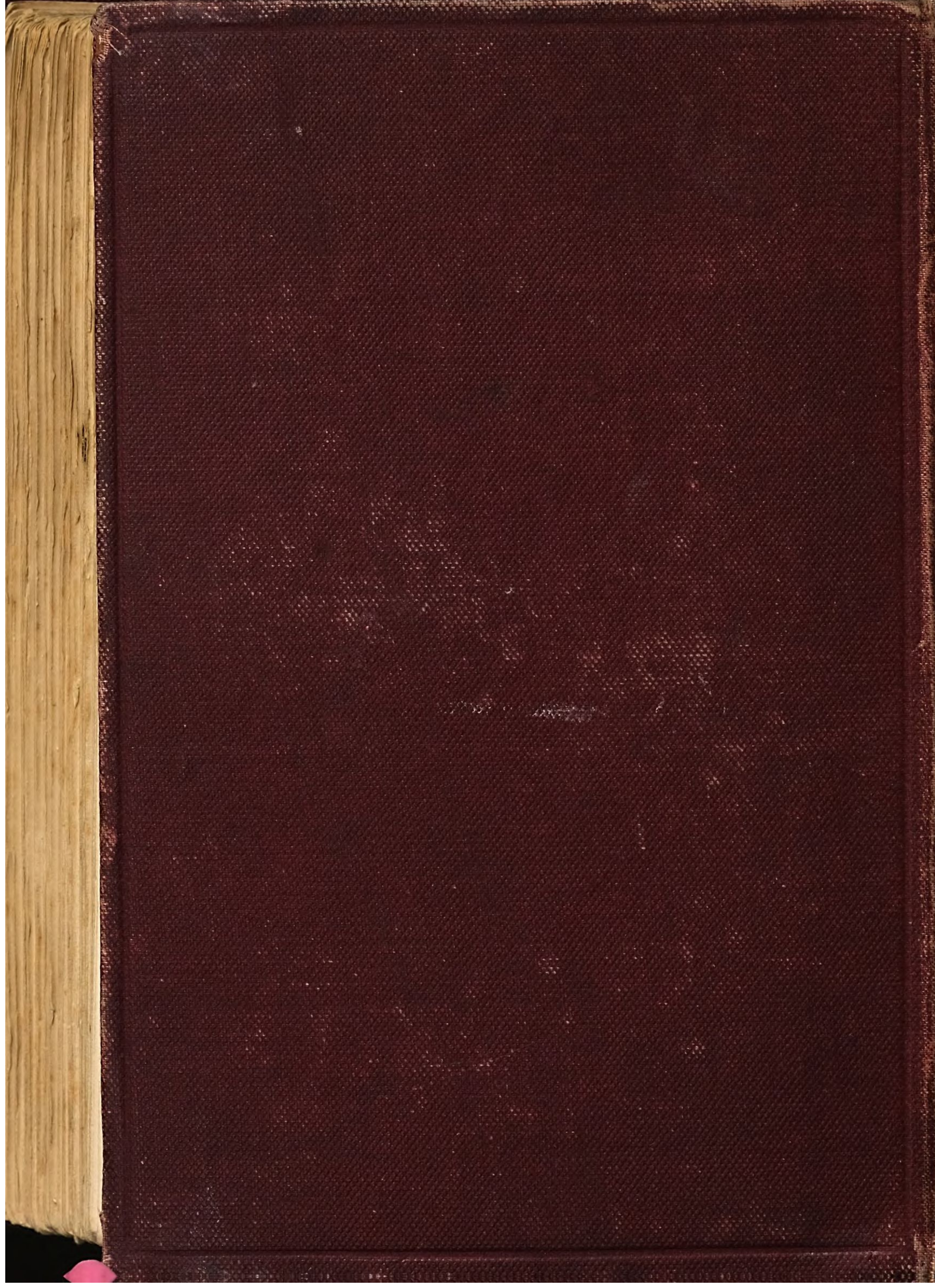
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